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ABSTRACT

This report chronicles the history of the East Hartford Connecticut Parents' Choice Project, the planning phase of a proposed education voucher program financed by the National Institute of Education (NIE), from February 1975 through January 1976. The report is based on the observations of an independent site historian, who attempted to be as unobtrusive in his observing and as nonjudgmental in his reporting as possible. A total of 41 site visits were made during the study. Chapter 1 introduces the report's main issues and events by examining the January 1976 vote by the East Hartford Board of Education to not pursue a five-year experimental voucher program. Chapter 2 discusses NIE's involvement in the Parents' Choice Project, and chapter 3 describes the participation of East Hartford's two parochial schools in the project. Chapter 4 examines in chronological order a series of major topics that affected the overall course of the Parents' Choice Project. (Author/JG)

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HISTORY OF EDUCATION VOUCHERS IN EAST HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

THE PARENTS' CHOICE PROJECT: FEBRUARY 1975 - JANUARY 1976

By William M. Weber

For the National Institute of Education
Contract # B2C-5331

C.M. LEINWAND ASSOCIATES • INCORPORATED

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Gordon Donaldson shared with me the writer's predicament in developing a parallel voucher history of New Hampshire.

Particular thanks is also due to the people who granted me interviews (See Appendix B for a listing). I trust they feel I honored their confidentiality.

While credit must be given to all the above, any mistakes are the author's.

William M. Weber

William M. Weber

		Page
Chapter 4	**The Parents' Choice Project**	71
	Introduction	73
	Project	73
	Project Organization	76
	Introduction	73
	Hiring Staff	76
	Reorganization	79
	Parent Information	81
	Introduction	81
	"Our Schools" Distributed 6/75	81
	Mini-Grants	84
	Introduction	84
	Mini-grants Awarded	84
	Bookkeeping	86
	In-Service	87
	Introduction	87
	In-Service Consultant Selected	87
	Launching the Plan	89
	Central Administration	90
	Assistant Superintendent Departs	90
	Administrative Philosophies	91
	Open Enrollment	92
	Introduction	92
	Opening Up Open Enrollment	93
	Transportation	95
	New Bus Routes Used	95
	Simulation	97
	Speakers Bureau	97
	Introduction	97
	Community	98
	Teachers	101
	Effect	102
	Teacher Opinions	103
	Introduction	103
	NEA Critique	103
	Teachers Polled	108
	Composite Criticism	109
	Popular Opinions	114
	Introduction	114
	Selecting a Consultant	115
	Parent Interviews	115
	Reporting Results	118
	Principals	119
	Introduction	119
	Principals' Vulnerability	120
	School Building Autonomy	121
	Open Meeting	123
	The Vote	126
	Strategy	126
	A Last Look	127
	Appendices	129
	A: Basic Contact Information	131
	B: Major Participants	137
	C: Brief Chronology	141
	D: Acronyms	145

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	5
Preface	9
A Note to the Reader	11
Chapter **1** **The Vote**	13
Introduction	15
Components of the East Hartford Voucher Program	16
Early Voucher History	18
Board Position Statements	23
Walter Miles	23
Richard Daley	24
Public Sentiment Against Vouchers	24
Program Diversity Questioned	25
One Best System	25
Joyce Ruggles	27
Richard Veltri	28
Robert Bannon	28
Lawrence Del Ponte	29
Barbara Atwood	30
Emery Daly	31
Eleanor Kepler	32
Roll Call	32
Chapter **2** **National Institute of Education**	35
Introduction	37
Obtaining Federal Funds	37
Funding Assurances	37
New Hampshire to the Rescue	39
Lobbying	40
Internal Debate Part I: *"If it's one site, it's East Hartford"*	41
Internal Debate Part II: *"Wait and See"*	42
A Gambling Commitment	43
New Schools	44
Private School Priority	44
Montessori Interest	47
CAPE Private School Study	48
Low Federal Profile	51
Introduction	51
Connecticut State Department of Education	51
Democracy at Work?	52
Chapter **3** **Parochial Schools**	53
Introduction	55
Private School/Public Issue	56
St. Christopher Middle School	59
St. Rose Middle School	61
Organizing Parents	62
Law Suit Anticipated	64
Legal Strategy	67

Preface

This history chronicles the evolution of the East Hartford Parents' Choice education voucher project from February 1975 through January 1976. This report, as well as the voucher project itself, was funded by the National Institute of Education (NIE).

Guidelines specified by NIE led to the development of a particular purpose and tone of which the reader must be aware while reading this document. First, NIE required the site historian neither to be from East Hartford nor to have any operational responsibility for the project. The guidelines reflected NIE's intent to remove the historian from having a stake in the outcome of events which might bias reporting. Thus, the historian was to be as objective as possible.

Furthermore, the historian's prose was to be nonjudgmental. Accordingly, an emphasis was placed upon direct quotations from a wide range of participants. Based upon this information, the reader could then draw his or her own conclusions. In this regard, it was believed that describing the ideas and actions of the East Hartford and NIE participants was more important than detailing the ideas and actions of the historian.

In addition, the historian was to be unobtrusive. He would attend dozens of meetings where he would not say a word. But questions could be raised before and after the meetings. All requests for confidentiality were honored. At no time were any of the historian's notes, reports, or verbal interpretations communicated to any voucher participant at the local or national level until after the end point of the history -- January 1976. It was hoped that this unobtrusiveness would reduce the self-consciousness of local participants about speaking or acting freely in the historian's presence.

The site historian guidelines held strategic importance for NIE. Resistance to federal "evaluation" had strained project communication at previous voucher planning sites. The notion of a harmless historian merely "recording events" was thought to be much less threatening to local participants than one of the judgmental outside evaluator. However, NIE had to play by the same rules. That is, the federal agency was subject to the same scrutiny, and it would also have the same lack of access to the historian's material as other participants, certainly an unusual situation for the payer of the (historian's) bills.

NIE officials admitted that a totally objective, unobtrusive, nonjudgmental historian was more of a goal than an attainable reality. However, they believed the low-keyed chronicle was worth trying, particularly as the controversial East Hartford voucher site would no doubt produce a number of conflicting partisan points of view.

As the history indicates, the East Hartford voucher project did not lack controversy. All the participants in the voucher issue, whether pro or con, believed "history was on their side."

Many residents and staff viewed the history as an absurd game which could amount to nothing regardless of who won. Others saw the voucher experience as a humorous bungling job committed by everyone who somehow had stumbled into view. For those uncommitted to any position, a sense of irony prevailed. Closely related to the comic and absurd points of view, these "historians" became skeptical upon realizing that supporters and detractors often said one thing, but just as often meant or did another.

Interpreting the history of East Hartford vouchers was, indeed, a popular and varied activity. It was the perception of events as significant which made East Hartford parents, school staff, and citizens in a sense all their own historians. However, because of this myriad of conflicting interpretations, NIE was concerned that there be someone with no vested interest to record East Hartford's consideration of the voucher idea. Hence, the support for the idea of a site historian.

However, the resources allocated for the historian's role were limited. The position was designed as a half-time assignment. This time included four hours of commuting for every trip, the compilation of notes and reports, as well as on-site interviews and observations. For the most part, East Hartford residents, project consultants and school personnel, as well as the NIE staff, generally extended to the historian full access to their meetings and documents. In all, forty-one site visits were made in the course of this study. Appendix A lists these visits as well as other forms of communication with the voucher project. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and evidence are based upon these site visits and analysis of project documents.

A Note to the Reader

Chapter I introduces the reader to the narrative's main issues and events by examining the January 26, 1976, East Hartford Board of Education voucher vote. The organization of the remaining history reflects the three primary areas of observed voucher-related activity:

Chapter II - National Institute of Education
Chapter III - Parochial Schools
Chapter IV - Parents' Choice Project

Appendices B, C, and D provide guides to major participants, chronology and acronyms used in the four chapters.

Two footnote systems are used. An * refers to a clarification or comment made by the author. Numbered footnotes document the source.

One further note is in order. It was the author's goal to provide a detailed account of major events and ideas. In turn, it is the reader's responsibility to select what is of specific interest to him or her.

Chapter 1

The Vote

Introduction
Components of the East Hartford Voucher Program
Early Voucher History
Board Position Statements
Walter Miles
Richard Daley
Public Sentiment Against Vouchers
Program Diversity Questioned
One Best System
Joyce Ruggles
Richard Veltri
Robert Bannon
Lawrence Del Ponte
Barbara Atwood
Emery Daly
Eleanor Kepler
Roll Call

Chapter 1

The Vote

INTRODUCTION

On January 26, 1976, the East Hartford Board of Education voted on a proposal to apply for a federal grant which would provide support for an educational voucher experiment. The proposed five-year program would have brought up to six and one-half million federal dollars to East Hartford, Connecticut, an industrial/residential city of almost sixty thousand people, including 10,500 public school students.

Until the Board members voted, the outcome seemed in doubt. The East Hartford Gazette, which had for three years closely followed local voucher developments, reported just prior to the ballot,

> "There have been unconfirmed reports of a possibly close vote, maybe even with the chairman breaking the tie in favor of the controversial proposal."

A chronicle of the Board members' vote concludes this chapter. It is preceded by a sketch of federal involvement with the voucher idea and an outline of the East Hartford special version. The reader should

consider this an introductory chapter. Subsequent chapters treat in more detail the National Institute of Education, parochial school involvement and Parents' Choice activities which molded the January 26 vote.

COMPONENTS OF THE EAST HARTFORD VOUCHER PROGRAM

The education voucher concept was straightforward. The local Board of Education would issue a voucher to each child. The value of the voucher could not be more than the cost of educating a child in public schools. Public and private schools participating in the experiment would redeem the voucher in return for educational services provided for the student.

The Project which planned the East Hartford voucher proposal was known as Parents' Choice.

The proposed voucher program included five components. Three of these components -- open enrollment, parent information, and school autonomy -- had been started in East Hartford prior to federal voucher study funding.

1. Open enrollment had been instituted by the local Board of Education in 1972. The policy allowed parents to enroll their child in any East Hartford public school if seats were available at the child's grade level and parents would provide transportation to and from the new school.

2. Parent information referred to the publication of an annual "Our Schools" booklet which described in detail the characteristics of each East Hartford public and private school. The booklet was written by teachers and distributed to all the parents of school age children.

3. Autonomy of schools encouraged principals and teachers to make as many decisions as possible at the individual school building level.

East Hartford had expanded these first three components by using federal study funds to simulate voucher program activities. Thus, Parent Advice Team paraprofessionals were employed to supplement the "Our Schools" booklet. In addition, an in-service training program

for school staff focused on a variety of "decisionmaking models" fostering school building autonomy.

However, the new proposal added two entirely new components: inclusion of parochial and private schools and a provision for free transportation.

4. Parochial and private schools, which met minimal state and federal requirements, would be eligible to receive publicly funded vouchers. Private and parochial tuition reimbursements would be paid in amounts not to exceed the cost of East Hartford public schooling.

5. Transportation would be provided for children who used their vouchers to transfer to other than their neighborhood schools.

NIE would pay for private school tuition as well as additional transportation expenses. The annual federal voucher allocations would also be used for other items. The "Our Schools" booklet would be revised, parent counseling would be expanded, and teachers would receive additional training. Contingency funds would have to be made available to pay teacher salaries if significant numbers of students had transferred out of a school, thus eliminating professional positions.

Monies which East Hartford might normally be expected to spend in maintaining its regular open enrollment, parent information, and school autonomy policies were to be contributed by the town during the five-year experiment.

The costs, along with the methods and goals of the ambitious five component program, were closely questioned by voucher critics. Opposing open enrollment, many parents and teachers favored a "neighborhood schools only" policy. The "Our Schools" booklet was criticized as costly and ineffective because it did not communicate real differences between schools. The concept of individual school autonomy was rejected by several Board of Education members who favored a more centrally organized school system. In addition, the possibility of an unsuccessful court fight was posed by critics who believed that parochial school inclusion violated the U.S. Constitution's separation of church and state doctrine. Although NIE had promised to pay for five years of voucher-related transportation, the question of who

would pay the costs after federal funds were withdrawn was often asked.

Voucher proponents, on the other hand, emphasized that open enrollment was necessary because neighborhood school programs could not make the same services available throughout an entire system. Providing free transportation, encouraging a wide range of choice by including private and parochial schools, increasing diversity through school autonomy and providing factual information to parents were justified as means to further the effectiveness of open enrollment.

EARLY VOUCHER HISTORY

Voucher advocates repeatedly promised that their program would make public and private schools more responsive to parents' and children's needs. Giving parents a voucher with which they could shop for their child's education was the key to their argument. The most notable of these Parents' Choice advocates was public school superintendent Eugene A. Diggs.

Diggs had been appointed East Hartford superintendent in July 1969 after working as a school administrator in Alaska, Missouri, and Kansas. In the early 1970's, Diggs had sponsored an East Hartford study of year-round schools. This idea, which did not gain widespread acceptance, did, however, help pin an "experimenter" tag on him.

Another early experiment was the open enrollment policy which was initiated by Diggs and approved by the Board of Education in 1972. At its inception, open enrollment made it possible for parents to transfer their children to schools outside their neighborhoods if seats were available and if the parents provided the transportation. Less than 150 students (less than 2 percent of eligible pupils) had elected this option annually. Nevertheless, the adoption of open enrollment reflected an unorthodox position vis-a-vis neighborhood schools. The policy established the claim of any child to attend any school which would best service his or her needs. The superintendent and central staff extended this open enrollment policy two steps further by publishing the "Our Schools" information booklets and encouraging individual school autonomy.

While Diggs was experimenting with open enrollment early in the 1970's, the federal government was simultaneously studying the possibility of introducing the education voucher idea to local school

districts. At the national level, voucher advocates had drawn support from both conservative and liberal backers. Conservatives saw vouchers as a means of introducing free-market economic principles into "monopolistic" public education. In particular, the Nixon administration intended to use education vouchers (along with performance contracting) as a means of challenging the "monopoly of public education" through the introduction of private enterprise. At the same time, liberal supporters hoped that vouchers would be a means of making schools more responsive to the people, especially the urban poor, by forcing schools to compete for each student's tuition.

Factions within the Nixon administration planned to implement a conservative voucher strategy. Historically, the federal agency, having inherited the program from the Johnson Democrats, had a different perspective. This agency, originally the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), viewed vouchers as a means of reforming school bureaucracies and redressing social inequality. Within OEO, vouchers were administered through a research and planning division, which tended to be less overtly political than other OEO units. As a consequence, the tensions between vouchers as "good business for private business" and "a means of social reform" were muted by more academic questions such as defining the implications of all possible voucher strategies.

In 1969 OEO had been approached by the Cambridge, Massachusetts based Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP) to study education voucher options. CSPP's eventual contract with OEO enabled them to advise the federal government on all matters of voucher policy. CSPP envisioned vouchers from the social reform (rather than a free enterprise) perspective. A major CSPP study, Education Vouchers: A Report on Financing Education by Grants to Parents, was published in December 1970.

This report, known as the "Blue Book," considered seven voucher policy alternatives. The regulated compensatory model, which was favored by CSPP, would prohibit schools from charging tuition beyond the value of the voucher. Schools could earn extra funds by accepting children from poor families or educationally disadvantaged children. The report recognized some of the technical and social problems with such a model, e.g., labeling a child as "disadvantaged" and dealing with the social stigma created. However, CSPP argued that the regulated compensatory model would be more likely to produce more

racially, economically, and academically integrated schools than in evidence in the existing system.

In developing the Blue Book study, CSPP staff, most notably Christopher Jencks, traveled to many cities. Conversations with administrators, teachers, and parents not only generated data for the study, but also developed some local interest in trying the voucher experiment. Dozens of school districts asked for more information. Many withdrew once they understood more about how the vouchers might actually work. In all, between 1969 and 1973, six school districts received OEO funds to study the feasibility of operating a full voucher project. These districts included Alum Rock, California; Seattle, Washington; Gary, Indiana; San Francisco, California; New Rochelle, New York; and Rochester, New York.

As part of their field work, CSPP advised the Connecticut State Legislature. They focused efforts upon legal requirements which would enable the federal government and local school districts to test a voucher program. The result was the quiet passage of Public Act 122 near the end of the 1972 Connecticut legislative session.

The passage of Public Act 122 encouraged further CSPP activity in Connecticut. The Act specifically encouraged participation of private schools in voucher-type programs -- a provision unique to the state. Hartford showed some voucher interest but became ambivalent and withdrew. CSPP continued its Connecticut efforts. The Center presented a voucher workshop at the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education 1973 Annual Meeting. East Hartford Public School Superintendent Eugene Diggs and the Board of Education Chairman Timothy Monahan attended that voucher session.

The voucher workshop focused on the experience of Alum Rock, the only school system which had ever adopted vouchers. Diggs reported that Monahan, realizing the similarity between open enrollment and vouchers, leaned over to him during the presentation and said,

> "There's nothing that they (Alum Rock) are doing right now which we couldn't do, except provide money for transportation and administrative training."

Following this CSPP workshop, Diggs entered into a series of negotiations with OEO staff who were then in the process of being transferred to the new federal agency responsible for vouchers -- the National Institute of Education (NIE). East Hartford's negotiating position was strong, since it -- and New Hampshire -- were the two remaining sites willing to consider an NIE voucher program. Diggs and his central administration staff came to agreement with NIE that the funds for the experimental program could be developed in such a way that new activities could be incorporated into the school system after the withdrawal of federal money. Soon thereafter, Diggs recommended to the East Hartford Board of Education that they should study the feasibility of adopting the voucher program. Early in December 1973, the East Hartford Board of Education voted to give the Superintendent the authority to plan such a study. Later in the month, representatives from East Hartford, NIE, and CSPP worked for three days writing a proposal draft. CSPP and East Hartford each separately revised the manuscript during the next two weeks. A formal proposal was finally submitted to NIE in the first days of 1974.

The voucher section within NIE was delighted with East Hartford's rapid submission of the proposal. Unlike economically poor Alum Rock, East Hartford seemed prosperous. According to the 1970 census, its annual median income was $12,000. Thus East Hartford seemed to present the possibility of testing the effects of vouchers on a financially sound community. Whereas racial and ethnic strife had plagued Gary, Indiana, and Rochester, New York, as well as other previous voucher sites, over 98 percent of East Hartford's 57,000-plus population was white. In addition, public school officials there were already worried about the possibility of having to absorb a large population of parochial school students because East Hartford's Catholic schools were having financial difficulties.

That East Hartford also showed interest in including private schools was no small inducement. NIE staff believed that the proposed program would thereby have the potential to provide a full voucher test of private-public competition. (The Alum Rock demonstration had never expanded beyond the public schools.) NIE's hopes were buoyed by the fact that Connecticut enabling legislation (Public Act 122) which provided for "education scholarship" programs allowed for private schools.

Denis Doyle, NIE voucher director, said,

> "When we came back from East Hartford, it seemed like the ideal site. It was as if East Hartford were the diamond as big as the Ritz."

Within two weeks after submitting their proposal, East Hartford was informally told by NIE that $69,000 had been released for their voucher feasibility study. By mid-February 1974, East Hartford had begun its three-month funded voucher feasibility study. The study was coordinated by Frances Klein, on leave from her position as East Hartford Supervisor of Reading. Most of the study's technical work was farmed out to consultants.

The Feasibility Study concluded that more work had to be done if East Hartford were to go ahead in adopting a voucher program. Additional federal monies were needed to provide more information and new procedures to assist students and teachers to transfer from one school to another, to transport more children, and to develop legal strategies to defend the inclusion of parochial schools. The study, "A Feasibility Analysis of Open Enrollment, East Hartford, Connecticut, January 21, 1974 to April 21, 1974," contained full consultant reports and recommendations.

In the spring of 1974, the East Hartford Board of Education put on their agenda the superintendent's recommendation to apply for a further NIE voucher planning grant. After several weeks' delay, the Board finally voted 5-4 to apply for futher voucher funds. An East Hartford grant extension proposal was sent by the East Hartford public schools to NIE in August, 1974. But by the time Diggs was able to forward the Board's intent in Washington, NIE's own budget had run into difficulty obtaining congressional approval. The Washington voucher staff feared that NIE officials might scuttle vouchers in order to gain additional lobby and congressional support.

Finally, in early 1975, CSPP and NIE representatives met with Diggs, Klein and other East Hartford staff to draft and redraft a proposal for a fifteen-month study to continue planning for an East Hartford voucher project. In February 1975 the proposal went into effect. Parents' Choice was the name of the new project.

The fate of East Hartford's voucher program lay with the Board of Education. Based upon the Parents' Choice findings, the Board was to vote in December 1975 whether or not to begin an actual voucher experiment in September 1976. As a result, many of the project's first ten months of activities would be planned in terms of bringing about a positive Board vote. However, because several consultant reports were delivered late, the Board's vote was rescheduled for January 1976. It was at this January 26, 1976, Board meeting that the varying voucher interests and perspectives were most forcefully and dramatically portrayed during the Parents' Choice Project. These Board member statements will now be described. Chapters II, III and IV chronicle the events leading up to this vote.

BOARD POSITION STATEMENTS

Walter Miles

After the Board Chairperson had opened the discussion, the first member requesting to speak was Walter Miles. Miles was the third-ranking Democrat on the Board. Known as a conservative, he had voted against the original proposal to study the feasibility of vouchers for East Hartford.

"I am 99 and 3/4% against the voucher proposal," Miles had been quoted as saying, and he repeated that all of the consultant reports, phone calls, and letters had not changed his mind.

Miles stressed that no Catholic authorities were pressuring him to vote for the voucher proposal, even though he was a Catholic. It had been clear to the public, and Board members in particular, that parochial school parents formed a potentially sizable voucher constituency. The proposed program would mean that each Catholic parent would receive a voucher equivalent to the cost of their child's parochial schooling (but not more than the public school cost). This would enable parents to send their children to participating sectarian or non-sectarian schools for free.

Miles's arguments repeated the critical litany of vouchers, which had become common in the public debate: East Hartford might have to absorb extra costs; parents could already transfer students if they provided transportation; neighborhood schools would be neglected; competition would encourage educational hucksterism; East Hartford should

not be NIE's guinea pig; the principals had voted 18-0 to reject vouchers.

He added that, since both metropolitan Hartford papers had editorialized in favor of vouchers, this type of support foreshadowed the possibility of "regionalization" (and with it the bussing of inner-city Hartford children to East Hartford).

"Pay attention to the three R's instead of focusing on vouchers," stressed Miles. "We don't need more innovative schemes in this town."

Miles did voice a strong pro-voucher argument for including parochial schools -- if a voucher program were to be adopted over his objection. "Free transportation should not be included in any voucher scheme," he said. However, the Parents' Choice staff believed that free transportation was necessary for any true voucher test. Without expanded school bus service, parents could not freely exercise educational choices, it was argued. Thus even if the Board went ahead with parochial schools but with no free transportation, as suggested by Miles, there may have been no voucher staff willing to implement that type of program.

The voucher tally was at this point, For-0/Against-1.

Richard Daley

Richard Daley, the newest Democrat on the Board of Education, spoke next. He had been appointed to the Board in spring of 1975 and won his first election the next November. At previous Board meetings, Daley would often be the first to notice when parliamentary procedures were violated or when one item in pages of budget figures was incorrect. Daley had been known to do his "homework" and was well prepared for the Parents' Choice vote.

Public Sentiment Against Vouchers

At a January 22, 1976 Open Meeting, Daley had taken notes during the three-and-a-half hours of testimony. Based on these calculations, he said that 63 percent of those speaking testified against the proposal; 37 percent were in favor of applying for the six and one-half million dollar grant. Daley further divided the 37 percent-in-favor category into two subcategories: those who had mentioned the advantage of parochial schools and those who had not. Consequently, Daley said, the

testimony could be categorized into three types: 63 percent against; 21 percent in favor -- independent of any parochial school involvement; and 16 percent for parochial school involvement. He said that the figures for those opposing the project in public testimony generally corresponded to telephone calls and letters he had received prior to the vote. Daley concluded, as had Miles, that the sentiment of the town was against the project.

Program Diversity Questioned

Daley also questioned the importance of differences among East Hartford public schools. A variety of programs providing opportunity for parents to choose was a basic voucher tenet. But Daley said that even he, as a Board member, did not have access to the type of information parents would need to compare schools.

In order to reach his own conclusions about school differences, Daley conducted some of his own research. A survey of school textbooks which had already been prepared for "in-house use by central administration," revealed what Daley thought were some surprising conclusions. Using the second grade as a sample, he found that fourteen of the schools used math books by the same publisher. He said he had talked to school professionals about this fact and was told that textbook publishers generally use the same pedagogical approach in their line of products. He admitted that many schools use more than one publisher. But nearly every school had used Houghton Mifflin materials for second grade mathematics. Daley said that sixteen schools also used the same English text in grade two.

This sample of textbooks, Daley said, and his talks with school professionals about these materials, led him to conclude that major differences seemed not to be in programs between schools but rather between programs in a given school. Thus, many schools used common textbooks, but they also used several books within the same grade. He added that educators told him that real differences come about more through the methods used in teaching rather than the particular textbook used in the class.

One Best System

Daley was building an argument against school autonomy and for one best school system. He had said that differences were not between

schools but within schools. He also felt that the method of teaching was the most important education variable. Building upon the second point, Daley criticized the position that voucher competition would identify which teaching method would be the best for the children of East Hartford. He said that it was the responsibility of the Central Administration and the Board of Education to identify the best methods. Daley emphatically did not believe the market mechanism of decentralized school economy in a voucher program could select educational methods and added,

> "If we do have a teaching system that's better, it seems best not to wait for the parents to determine it; we -- the Board of Education and administration -- should make sure it benefits all."

Daley cited additional reasons why he was voting against the Parents' Choice proposal. The free-marketplace analogies which had been voiced in the weeks prior to the vote had riled him. Here it had been argued that if a public school was inefficient at providing what the consumers wanted, just as in business, the school would have to change what it was doing in order to survive. One pro-voucher citizen had said that competition had helped make the Pittsburgh Steelers Super Bowl football champions. Daley claimed that type of analogy was so foolish that it was not worth a detailed refutation. But he did say that the intent of competition, independent of its use in the analogy, was a misdirected argument. He believed that sharing, not competition, should be the aim of education. Furthermore, the goal of equal educational opportunity for all students should be provided regardless of what neighborhood school they may attend. Daley feared that wholesale transfers would undermine the ability of neighborhood schools to assure equal opportunity.

Daley had not publicly taken a voucher position prior to the vote, having claimed he was a new Board member and needed time to study the issues. However, his emphasis on central authority was not surprising, nor was his skepticism of the particulars of the Parents' Choice Project. His statements were consistent with earlier Board of Education comments he had made. Thus his negative vote had been expected.

The voucher tally was now, For-0/Against-2.

Joyce Ruggles

Joyce Ruggles, the fourth-ranking Democrat, spoke after Richard Daley. She began by reaffirming her interest in the project and reminded the public that she had voted initially in favor of studying vouchers. She emphasized she was still in philosophical agreement with the idea that parents were in an ideal position to make the best choice for their children. With a glance towards Daley and Miles, she was saying in effect that there is not one system best for all children and that it would be better to search for a variety of programs to meet the special needs of all public school children. This was the first acceptance of a fundamental Parents' Choice argument voiced by a Board member that night.

But the application of the voucher idea to East Hartford reality simply had not worked, according to Ruggles. Parents just didn't seem comfortable with the idea. Here Ruggles was partly alluding to the fact that, at best, only 15 percent of parents had indicated they might transfer their children in a voucher program. Estimates were frequently closer to 5 percent.

More importantly, Ruggles said the voucher experiment could not work if the professionals who would run the program did not favor it. Her argument was well substantiated. Parents' Choice and teacher union surveys consistently showed majority opposition to the voucher concept. Moreover, James Dakin, president of the East Hartford Educational Association, the local teacher union, had made it clear to the Board of Education that his group was strongly against the voucher program and would fight its implementation.

Ruggles concluded that the idea of vouchers seemed appealing but its application to East Hartford did not seem feasible. Newspaper reports had listed her as a swing vote. She had said that her mind was made up but she would not release her position to the press. Project staff had thought of her as one of the uncommitted votes most likely to swing in their favor. She did not.

The voucher tally was now, For-0/Against-3.

Richard Veltri

Richard Veltri, the second-ranking Republican, followed Ruggles. By coincidence, Veltri had been appointed to the Republican seat in early spring 1975, about the same time that Richard Daley received his appointment.

According to Veltri, the proposal's costs simply outweighed its benefits. He asserted that only 5 to 9 percent of East Hartford students might want to transfer schools. But according to budget information presented to him by the Parents' Choice staff, the cost of transportation for probably less than one thousand students would amount to somewhere between $50,000 and $200,000. Coupled with estimates for parochial school tuition and administration costs, the actual expenses, Veltri believed, might well exceed the $1,300,000 figure mentioned by Parents' Choice staff.

Veltri had called up the Parents' Choice office several times for clarification and for information in addition to budget figures. Instead of coming out in favor of the Parents' Choice proposal, he developed one of his own. Veltri's proposal hinged upon a questionable assumption that the State of Connecticut would reimburse East Hartford on an average-daily-attendance formula. The Veltri proposal was not submitted at the Board meeting, but was given to Superintendent Diggs afterwards. Diggs told the Parents' Choice Executive Board the next day that, on paper, Veltri's plan would cost East Hartford only $24 to support its own voucher program.*

Veltri had been thought of as one of the swing votes who might support vouchers. His own plan notwithstanding, he was not voting for the Parents' Choice proposal on January 26.

The voucher tally was now, For-0/Against-4.

Robert Bannon

Robert Bannon, the second-ranking Democrat, clearly favored the proposal. The present policy of open enrollment on a seats-available basis was labeled discriminatory by Bannon. The key was to provide transportation. Bannon pointed out that only parents with cars and flexible schedules to drive their children to and from school could take

* The Veltri plan was never formally considered by the Parents' Choice Executive Board.

advantage of open enrollment. Bannon affirmed parents' rights to make the best choices for their children. Here, he echoed a clear but distinct minority opinion voiced by public witnesses at earlier meetings. The position Bannon took that night was consistent with the pro-voucher support he had voiced throughout the Parents' Choice Project and in voting to apply for that project's -- and the Feasibility Study's -- NIE monies.

In addition, Bannon charged that the Board's current policy was inconsistent. East Hartford paid transportation costs of students who went to state schools outside East Hartford. Some of these "transfers" were mandated by the State of Connecticut's special education law. This law made local boards of education responsible for providing school opportunities outside of the school district if needs could not be satisfied by their own schools.*

Bannon introduced the out-of-East Hartford school issue in order to force a consistent policy position in favor of free transportation for all out-of-neighborhood school transfers. But he said that if the Board voted against the proposal, they should "go all the way" and make all the schools the same. Certain schools with special programs, according to Bannon, were only available to children who happened to live in that neighborhood. For example, only children at a certain middle school could attend the gifted program. Bannon argued that with the Parents' Choice free transportation program, children who did not live in that neighborhood could have the opportunity to attend the program. Bannon felt very strongly in favor of differentiating programs, but opposed their being offered without effective equal educational opportunity.

Bannon had seconded the original 1973 motion to extend and improve the open enrollment policy. This motion had formed the parliamentary basis for the vote on the night of January 26, 1976. He still was clearly in favor and had been quoted in the newspapers as saying it was as good as "motherhood and apple pie." As expected, Bannon posted a favorable vote.

The voucher tally was now, For-1/Against-4.

Lawrence Del Ponte

Lawrence Del Ponte spoke next. The fifth-ranking Democrat, he had been thought of as one of the swing votes. A number of concerns had

* There was some confusion about whether agricultural and vocational students were transferred because of state law or by East Hartford's own policy.

not been satisfactorily answered by the Parents' Choice studies, according to Del Ponte. School building autonomy might create too much competition. As had Richard Daley, he voiced the opinion that cooperation seemed more important than competition. Even if 15 percent opted to transfer (which was the most generous estimate offered), this meant that at least 85 percent of the town's parents favored neighborhood schools. Thus, he inferred that the majority of potential clients of the program did not feel the need for change.

He also feared that the processing of increased transfers would create many unanticipated administrative problems, as well as clearly costing a great deal of money. He was alarmed that the transportation bill would top $1,000,000, far exceeding federal provisions in that area.* East Hartford would have to pay for that difference.

Del Ponte favored private school inclusion if parochial schools could receive voucher payments. He added the concern that it did not seem fair that these schools could use admission tests to screen out applicants whereas any child could attend a public school. The problem of differences between parochial schools and public schools had been voiced by many Board members in the past. However, project staff had received legal advice to maintain a policy of nonentanglement which would keep public agencies out of the internal affairs of religious organizations. This nonentanglement would be to the voucher experiment's best advantage in withstanding a constitutional court case focusing on the First Amendment -- the separation of church and state. Therefore Del Ponte's concern about parochial school admission tests could be raised, but not immediately resolved by the Parents' Choice Project. Thus Del Ponte's support for the parochial school component without a vote to apply for federally subsidized transportation amounted to a "no" vote.

The voucher vote was now, For-1/Against-5.

Barbara Atwood

Barbara Atwood, the ranking Republican, spoke next. Although she rarely spoke at Board meetings, she was known as "a conservative." It was also known that she was very much in favor of the voucher program; she had originally voted to apply for Parents' Choice funds. However, her stated position varied from the traditional reasons usually associated with the conservative voucher support. The conservative

* Board members' cost estimates were not always comparable. See for example, Veltri's figures.

position usually stressed the introduction of marketplace competition which would break up the public school monopoly of education. This position had been frequently and significantly espoused by Milton Friedman, a University of Chicago economist, and by the New Hampshire voucher study which was occurring simultaneously to East Hartford's. *

But Atwood did not speak about the educational marketplace. Instead she said that East Hartford could work out the program if they really wanted it, and most importantly, that other communities could learn from what they did. She said that East Hartford's problems were minor compared to those of big cities and perhaps this proposal could be of help to the rest of the country.

She added that, since most children rarely spend more than five years in one school in East Hartford, the withdrawal of federal funds after five years would not have a disastrous effect on children who chose to change programs in the near future.

Unlike many Board members and people who in public testimony distrusted "a federal giveaway program," Atwood concluded that if Uncle Sam wanted to pick up the tab, they should let him do it.

The voucher tally at this point was, For-2/Against-5.

Emery Daly

Emery Daly was the newest Board member. He had won his Republican seat three months earlier in the November Board of Education election. At that time he had outpolled Kenneth Carrier, the Board's most vocal opponent of vouchers. Daly not only literally took Carrier's seat, but he also assumed Carrier's position as the major critic of the project. His views were well known and a negative vote was a certainty.

Daly's presentation was short. He favored similar programs in all schools -- in effect, the expansion of centralized administration. He squarely opposed the school building autonomy which had been proposed by Parents' Choice and supported by the school superintendent.

He added that the whole project simply would cost too much. Daly quickly concluded that he was against the proposal.

The voucher tally was now, For-2/Against-6.

* See Education Vouchers in New Hampshire: An Attempt At Free Market Educational Reform by Gordon A. Donaldson, Jr., C.M. Leinwand Associates, Inc., 430 Lexington Street, Newton, MA 02166

Eleanor Kepler

Eleanor Kepler, a Democrat, presented her position for the first time. She had voted for the Feasibility Study and used her chairpersonship to insure a fair hearing for Parents' Choice. As Chairperson, she could formally vote only to break a tie. But she said that the importance of the decision forced her at least to voice her opinion.

Kepler was sympathetic to the program and approved the philosophy of different programs for different schools. She saw merit in the argument that if East Hartford did not apply for federal funds, their tax money would be spent elsewhere. And she realized that the Parents' Choice funds provided money to upgrade the Board's accounting system, thereby keeping in line with the State of Connecticut's directives for all districts to change over to a program planning and budgeting system.

But Kepler was perplexed. Community sentiment was mixed. Vouchers lacked a clear mandate. She added that the church-state issue worried "many of us." To let the courts decide was evidently an unsatisfactory solution for her to the ethical and political problems stemming from the doctrine of the separation of church and state.

The principal's 18-0 vote against vouchers was the turning point in weighing the evidence against the proposal, according to Kepler. Even the best of school autonomy programs could not survive if the people who had to manage it within the system, i.e., the principals, mostly opposed it.

ROLL CALL

At 8:40 p.m., the formal roll call on a policy extension amendment necessary to apply for new voucher funds was taken. Bannon, as Board secretary, read off members' names:

Bannon -- Yes
Ruggles -- No
Atwood -- Yes
Del Ponte -- No
Veltri -- No
Daley -- No
Daly -- No
Miles -- No

Flanked by the conservative Atwood and liberal Bannon, the remainder of the Board had rejected the Parents' Choice proposal.

Critics of education vouchers had won a decisive victory.

Chapter 2

National Institute of Education

Introduction
Obtaining Federal Funds
Funding Assurances
New Hampshire to the Rescue
Lobbying
Internal Debate Part I:
"If it's one site, it's East Hartford"
Internal Debate Part II:
"Wait and See"
A Gambling Commitment
New Schools
Private School Priority
Montessori Interest
CAPE Private School Study
Low Federal Profile
Introduction
Connecticut State Department of Education
Democracy at Work?

Chapter 2

National Institute of Education

INTRODUCTION

The January 26, 1976, East Hartford Board of Education vote brought political closure to almost three years of Federal efforts to introduce an educational voucher test in East Hartford.

When East Hartford had begun considering the voucher idea in 1973, the National Institute of Education's voucher staff had already realized that local school districts were hesitant about buying into one more federal experiment. The prevalent fear and distrust of anything labeled "federal" or "experimental" made NIE reluctant to forcefully advocate the untested plan even though it was Washington which paid the East Hartford voucher bills. The dilemmas of Federal funding and the limited NIE intervention into the Parents' Choice Project are described in this chapter.

OBTAINING FEDERAL FUNDS

Funding Assurances

"As long as the proposal is a solid one, supported by the community, it would be foolhardy for NIE to refuse to support it," said Denis Doyle, NIE voucher director, to the East Hartford Board of Education

on April 3, 1975.[1] Doyle was referring to a proposal to begin a full-scale East Hartford voucher program in September 1976 based upon the recommendations of the Parents' Choice voucher planning project. Doyle admitted that the question was still hypothetical, since an actual Board of Education proposal had not yet been submitted to the federal government.

While the East Hartford proposal was hypothetical, the historical precariousness of the NIE budget was not. For example, one annual NIE budget request had been slashed from $130 million to $70 million, and if Oregon Congressional Representative Green had her way, the NIE budget would have been totally eliminated. Moreover, the NIE director at the time, Thomas Glennan, believed that congressional hostility towards vouchers had jeopardized other NIE programs. To voucher proponents, it appeared that NIE leadership was willing to jettison vouchers to save the agency. This meant less money would be available for any new voucher venture such as East Hartford's.

Public school superintendent Diggs and other East Hartford officials were aware of the uncertain NIE budget picture. The Parents' Choice monies had already been delayed six months because of NIE's un[illegible] financial status. Diggs therefore wanted in writing Doyle's 197[illegible] surance that a "solid" proposal would be approved for a full-fledged voucher experiment based on the Parents' Choice planning grant.

In mid-May, the superintendent asked for the following NIE pledges to be formally confirmed:

> -- The government remains committed to the 'fullest test' of vouchers permitted under existing legislation;
> -- In case of funding for a project which includes parochial schools, the grant would include funds for a court test; and
> -- HEW would request that the Department of Justice intervene directly in support of the school district.
> 'I wish to move ahead... Program

1. Hartford Times, April 7, 1975.

changes for which we are now planning could be profoundly valuable to the children in our schools. I respectfully request at the Secretary's earliest convenience assurances that our planning will not be futile![2]

However, even if NIE were totally committed to the voucher proposal, it could not guarantee five-year funding because its own budget had to be annually reviewed and approved by Congress. Doyle was forced to refuse Diggs's request for a formal pledge saying that a five-year commitment would be impossible. Doyle felt, however, that the request for legal defense support was "entirely reasonable" and that HEW general counsel would agree.[3]

New Hampshire to the Rescue[4]

Few East Hartford parents or school staff knew that the simultaneous development of the New Hampshire voucher project had kept the Connecticut site's funding hopes alive.

The New Hampshire voucher experiment began in 1973 as a straightforward attempt to put the Nixon stamp on the liberal reform-minded voucher activity. Approaching a conservative state, Nixon officials proposed to New Hampshire a test of the free enterprise system through the use of an unregulated voucher model. Other than minimum health and safety regulations, this model would put few controls on the use of vouchers.

By late fall 1974, NIE staff believed that if East Hartford were to receive any money, it would have to be linked to New Hampshire. It was New Hampshire which had political ties to the White House through State Board of Education Chairman William Bittenbender who in turn brought political leverage to the NIE budget. Even though the two sites were supported by the same funding agency and assisted by the Center for the Study of Public Policy, there was little contact between them. At one point in the fall of 1975, Superintendent Diggs was to have visited the New Hampshire site but was unable to because of other commitments. Their primary communication was reading about each other through newspaper releases.

Diggs's primary commitment was to obtain a favorable East Hartford

2. Hartford Courant, May 21, 1975.
3. Hartford Times, 1975.
4. See Gordon Donaldson Jr., Education Vouchers in New Hampshire: An Attempt at Free Market Educational Reform,

Board of Education voucher vote. But he and several others feared there would be insufficient NIE monies available if both East Hartford and New Hampshire proposed "solid" voucher programs.

Despite the supposed advantages of linking New Hampshire and East Hartford, no voucher funds had been included in NIE's budget planning for 1976 as of spring 1975. A contingency plan was to use fiscal 1977 monies for September 1976 voucher operations, thus side-stepping the spring 1975 budget omission. However, this planning overlooked the problems created by the upcoming "wedge period." The wedge period was the four-month lapse between the old fiscal year ending on June 30, 1976, and the new federal budget calendar which would end annually on October 31.

Some monies had to be appropriated for the wedge period, according to NIE Senior Associate Robert Cunningham who stated,

> "It became obvious to everyone that if fiscal year '76 extended until the end of September, it would be too late to in any way convince the site that they had to wait until November 1 to begin an operations year."

Lobbying

By August 1975, Diggs and the local voucher staff realized that the NIE budget seemed increasingly less likely to include funds to support an East Hartford voucher project. The previous year, NIE initially had had no voucher monies either, but political pressure and in-house NIE maneuvering had finally released monies needed for East Hartford and New Hampshire.

An August 19, 1975, East Hartford budget strategy session arranged by CSPP included the public and parochial school superintendents and the Parents' Choice staff. The participants focused on what pressures East Hartford could use to release voucher funds once again. One outcome of the session was that letters were sent to U.S. Senator Abraham Ribicoff, Governor Ella Grasso, and the Chairman of the New Hampshire Board of Education, William Bittenbender.

Yet there was an absence of strong "higher up" leadership and support.

4. (continued) C. M. Leinwand Associates., Inc., 430 Lexington St., Newton, MA 02166.

While the former Secretary of HEW, Casper Weinberger, had been a strong and persistent supporter of vouchers, David Matthews, the new secretary of HEW, had not taken a definite stand vis-a-vis vouchers.

Furthermore, NIE and HEW were not in full communication about the inclusion or exclusion of vouchers in the upcoming budget. When Diggs contacted William Taft, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of HEW was apparently surprised that vouchers were not included in the NIE budget.

Connecticut Congressional Representative Cotter was called by Diggs to help clarify the situation. Cotter's administrative assistant then called NIE and was given a standard response: when the proposal was received, it would be evaluated; based on monies available at the time, it might be funded. NIE's Project Officer for East Hartford, Ola Clarke said her name had been given to Cotter's office to call if there were any further questions. Clarke did not receive any further calls.*

Internal Debate Part I: "If it's one site, it's East Hartford"

In August 1975, New Hampshire Congressman James C. Cleveland wrote to NIE asking for clarification on the funding issues. The gist of Cleveland's message was: "Why fund a planning project if you are not prepared to fund its implementation?"

The Cleveland letter gave Cunningham an opportunity to press the funding situation. Denis Doyle, the NIE voucher director, was vacationing; therefore, Cunningham took the Cleveland letter to Arthur Melmed, the NIE Director of School Finance and Productivity (the administrative unit responsible for vouchers). Melmed agreed with Cunningham that an action memorandum for NIE Director Hodgkinson should be written.

The action memorandum, an intraagency note, was intended to provide background information which would contribute to and hasten a policy decision. It was not a "public" document. The memo emphasized the substantive importance for NIE of further testing the voucher concept. These tests would be structured around issues such as evaluating the voucher effect upon diversity of choice, equal eduational opportunity, accountability, and per-pupil budgeting. Cunningham argued that once the political and substantive issues were considered, East Hartford would be a more desirable site than New Hampshire. He urged making East Hartford the funding priority.

* NIE staff felt that East Hartford's Washington influence was most effectively exercised through their agency and HEW. They contrasted this "bureaucratic" mode to New Hampshire's more "political" ties to the White House.

The CSPP staff, based in Cambridge, were upset that Cunningham had not let them know ahead of time about the substance of his memo. Historically, the CSPP staff had been accustomed to such a policy role. But Cunningham explained, "It was never a conscious decision to exclude CSPP." Involving them would have been time-consuming and Cunningham wanted to exploit the timing of Cleveland's memo and get it surfaced and the issues to Hodgkinson as soon as possible.

Cunningham did admit, however, that the memo contained "some things which rather clearly and candidly might demoralize the Center staff." As the funding decision on the proposal was still three months away, he felt that there was no reason to "demoralize a group of people whose best efforts should be directed at pushing the sites along."

Internal Debate Part II: "Wait and see"

When Doyle returned from vacation, he was greeted by a CSPP-NIE uproar about the Cunningham memo. As New Hampshire had kept the voucher program going for several years, many felt it would be a political injustice to favor East Hartford, as Cunningham had argued, before an operational proposal had been submitted.

The Cunningham memo accelerated CSPP lobbying efforts to assure funding commitments. On September 8, 1975, Doyle, Cunningham, and CSPP Director David Cohen met in Washington to discuss further actions. Based on this meeting, Doyle wrote a new memorandum.

That only one voucher site would probably need further funding was Doyle's argument to NIE officials. A "betting man" would wager that, [since] "only one out of six feasibility sites had come to fruition, it would be perfectly reasonable to assume that only one of these two (East Hartford and New Hampshire) would go operational," Doyle later explained. As of Fall 1975, NIE's decision to approve funding for one site was based largely on this "betting man's" perspective.

Doyle described some of the bookkeeping considerations behind his thinking:

> "What we would do is commit $300,000 of our fiscal '76 budget, which would be a down payment on a substantially larger amount. Our

internal estimate is that East Hartford can be run for a full year for about $1,300,000. That would include evaluation, data collection, vouchers for nonpublic school kids, administration, bussing, etc. About a third of the $1,300,000 would be data collection and evaluation and a million and one would go to East Hartford for the other costs. And the $300,000 that NIE would make available out of fiscal '76 would simply be a down payment on that. We would offer them an incrementally funded contract for sixty months at approximately $1,100,000 for the five years with some inflation factor. And they would then draw the money as they needed it."

NIE budget estimates were a ballpark guess. Clarke and Cunningham had estimated costs for tuition, transportation, and administration in advance of planning for any of these costs by East Hartford. (It turned out that East Hartford's consultant estimated that the voucher values would be higher and administrative costs would be lower than NIE figures.) Clarke explained,

"The individual items in that budget were really just backup for the person in the NIE budget shop who reviewed the total figures -- they were more interested in the amount of money we were talking about for the project than in the individual parts."

A Gambling Commitment

Doyle and the voucher staff could not by themselves assure NIE funds, especially when no such funds were included in the upcoming planning budgets. For this reason both Cunningham's action memo ("If it's one site, it's East Hartford") and Doyle's response (a "betting man's" wager)

were designed to inform and persuade the man who had the power to make the budget decision -- Harold Hodgkinson, the director of NIE.

Hodgkinson agreed with Doyle's "betting man's" one-site thinking. But the NIE director still had to find a quarter of a million dollars to provide for preliminary voucher operations. Without such a commitment for operational funds, and a pledge to pay the cost of any legal defense, Diggs had told project staff he would not recommend that the East Hartford Board of Education apply for further NIE voucher monies. After several months of deliberations, against a background of growing uneasiness from the federal staff assigned to East Hartford, Hodgkinson resorted to his own discretionary funds as NIE director. Finally, after a December 12, 1975, visit by East Hartford school officials, Hodgkinson signed a letter committing NIE to $1.3 million for the first year and making five-year finding an agency priority.

At a December East Hartford Board of Education meeting, Diggs quoted from Hodgkinson's letter,

> "I have contingency funds in the current budget so that the project in East Hartford could be funded if the plans now being completed appear to be a strong and prudent investment, and provide for the broadest possible test of education vouchers."

The letter also pledged NIE to pay for the costs of legal battles expected if parochial schools participated in the voucher program.

NIE was taking a gamble. The agency could get together money for only one site. Yet as of December 1975, both East Hartford and New Hampshire voucher staffs were independently hoping and planning for a full-scale NIE-funded voucher program to begin in 1976.

NEW SCHOOLS

Private School Priority

The December 1975 Parents' Choice press release calling attention to Hodgkinson's commitment said that Diggs believed,

> "NIE might not be interested in Parents' Choice if nonpublic schools were excluded. This is the first time they have specified this."

The release was misleading if not incorrect. NIE had long urged East Hartford to include private schools.

In a June 1974 letter, Doyle wrote Diggs that the NCER* had resolved,

> "The design of additional projects by the Institute and local participants should include participation by nonpublic schools insofar as this is permitted by law."

Doyle noted that Connecticut enabling legislation (Public Act 122) allowed for parochial school participation. He concluded,

> "It is appropriate for you to explore the feasibility of permitting parochial schools to participate in the knowledge that our policy does not prohibit their participation and to submit your proposal for a voucher demonstration project to us. The decision of NIE and the NCER will be made on the basis of the overall education research interest of the proposal."

NIE would, in effect, only fund a voucher experiment that included public and private schools. Private school participation meant, according to NIE, the possibility of public and private school competition in an educational marketplace. Because Alum Rock had included only public schools, it was referred to as a limited voucher experiment. NIE wanted East Hartford to be a full voucher experiment.

East Hartford's only private schools were two parochial schools, St. Rose and St. Christopher. If only parochial schools were involved, there would not be any test of secular private schools. Furthermore, NIE was interested in encouraging institutional risk-taking and the

*National Council of Educational Research -- NIE's policy advisory board.

creation of new schools. In an April 16, 1975, letter to Diggs, NIE's Ola Clarke urged him to,

> "Consider ways in which the Expanded Parents' Choice Program can encourage new school development within East Hartford during this grant period. We feel that the encouragement of private suppliers in East Hartford is essential in order to provide the widest possible range of educational choices to parents. Perhaps you might consider some small research awards to groups or individuals to study the feasibility of establishing new schools within East Hartford and produce report(s) highlighting the tasks that need to be done, including legal requirements and constraints and cost factors. Such a report or reports would be of interest to NIE and especially relevant to the Board of Education in its decisionmaking process in December. Of course, any activity, other than having project staff study new school development, would require some reprogramming of funds, but we will expedite at this end."

Planning for the inclusion of private schools began during the summer of 1975 when Frances Klein was given Parents' Choice responsibility for this task. The 1974 Feasibility Study directed by Klein had already formulated a number of questions and specific guidelines in this area, e.g., admission requirements and academic standards. As Klein, who had been hired as a summer consultant, began to bring the Feasibility Study material up-to-date for Parents' Choice, the project's legal counsel advised that a nonentanglement legal strategy would best survive a court test. This tactic accentuated the necessity for the public schools to have as little to do as possible with the internal affairs of the private

schools, and sectarian ones in particular. As a result, the encouragement of private school development was shelved.

The nonentanglement strategy notwithstanding, local initiative had not been forthcoming for private school development. At a time when declining school enrollments moved the public school superintendent to recommend (unsuccessfully) the closing of several schools, the idea of developing private alternatives simply did not seem to be in the public schools' self-interest, and especially not in the interest of public school teachers who feared losing their jobs. Diggs mentioned several times the school teachers' incredulity that he was talking about helping private schools. Thus, in a diversified project with multiple pressures and goals, the priority to secure private school participation was usually put aside for "more pressing problems."

Montessori Interest

Despite a lack of enthusiasm to promote private schools, the Parents' Choice staff were willing to discuss vouchers when a private school showed interest and initiated a meeting which could be held at the Parents' Choice office. An opportunity for a Parents' Choice/private school discussion was prompted by a mid-October written request for such a meeting by Mary Daly, administrator of the Montessori School of Greater Hartford.

Daly had been told by Archdiocese of Hartford School Superintendent Fanelli that private schools might participate in the voucher program. Daly had already been in contact with Fanelli concerning a committee then at work developing new official state guidelines for Connecticut private schools. Fanelli was a member of the committee. *

The Montessori School for Greater Hartford included 112 students from two-and-a-half to ten years of age. These students attended one of the school's three rented sites which were located in West Hartford and nearby Simsbury. It was hoped that vouchers would enable them to secure a larger and more stable site.

A Montessori-Parents' Choice meeting was arranged for October 30, 1975. Andrew Esposito, the Parents' Choice coordinator; Don Richard, the CSPP field representative; Mary Daly, the Montessori administrator who had initiated the meeting, and the Montessori school treasurer met to discuss the possibility of vouchers for private schools.

* He was also superintendent for East Hartford's two parochial schools which were considering entering the voucher experiment.

The problem of bringing a private school into a public school program, without violating the basic principles of the private school, became clear to both parties at the October 30 meeting.

The Montessori school preferred its students to begin school by the age of three and continue through an ungraded sequence until the age of at least ten. Admitting children at the "kindergarten" age of five had been found too trying for the new students and disruptive for the old ones already familiar with the special Montessori educational methods.

The public school procedure of admitting children at age five and promoting them annually through a succession of age-segregated grades was less than compatible with the Montessori way.

Even these initial voucher talks indicated that coordinating the public and Montessori methods would not be as simple as just "redeeming the value of the voucher." Since the voucher values were estimated at one price for kindergarten ($676), one price for grades 1-5 ($1372), and another for grades 6-8 ($1499), there was no easy way to translate voucher values to the ungraded school. Nor would the Montessori school want to begin students at the kindergarten age, for that was two years older than their optimum entrance year.

Year of entry and translating voucher values were but two knotty questions which were raised in this initial private school discussion. As the Parents' Choice Project had not squarely surveyed private school needs, nor systematically analyzed problems which private schools would face, neither Esposito nor Richard could provide definitive answers at this time.

To begin tackling many of the questions and concerns raised -- but in no way answered -- by initial inquiries such as the Montessori School's problems, the Parents' Choice staff extended an invitation to Robert Lamborn, president of the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) to a meeting scheduled for November 22, 1975.

CAPE Private School Study

Representatives from several Hartford area private schools met on November 25 in East Hartford with Superintendent Diggs, Parents'

Choice staff, Parochial School Superintendent Fanelli, Don Richard, NIE's Doyle, and Robert Lamborn, president of CAPE.* They were anxious to discuss the potential for private school involvement in the proposed voucher program.

The Council for American Private Education (CAPE) included eleven pre-collegiate private school associations. Each of these associations was an umbrella group by itself, for example, the National Association of Independent Schools, Hebrew Day Schools Association, etc. The member organizations were nonprofit and had nondiscriminatory admissions policies; their membership dues financed CAPE. CAPE and NIE had worked together on nonvoucher projects. Thus, it was not surprising that, when NIE realized East Hartford was avoiding the private school issue, NIE went to CAPE's president, Lamborn, for help.

The necessity for including secular private schools stemmed from legal considerations. In order to qualify as a full test of the voucher model, both public and private schools had to compete for students. As East Hartford had only two private schools -- both of which were Roman Catholic -- legal counsel felt East Hartford might not meet the requirements of a full test. According to Parents' Choice legal counsel Post and Pratt, and Alan Schwartz, a Rutgers law professor advising parochial schools, it was necessary to include private secular schools as well. Without secular participation, it was feared the U.S. Supreme Court would rule the voucher program unconstitutional because only church-related private schools would be receiving aid. Thus, including secular private schools would enable the voucher project to survive the anticipated "diversity" legal test.

NIE had introduced Lamborn to Diggs when the superintendent visited Washington earlier in October. At that time, plans for a Lamborn visit to East Hartford were being drawn up. Originally, Doyle had not planned to become involved during Lamborn's November 25 meeting; however, Doyle had participated in an East Hartford legal strategy meeting the week before and realized that more NIE pressure had to be applied to get the private school issue rolling. Consequently, Doyle arranged to attend the Lamborn meeting. As Doyle had not been in East Hartford for several months, his decision to visit the site twice within five days could be taken as nothing less, from East Hartford's point of view, than NIE's insistence about the importance of the private school issue.

*The Montessori School elected not to pursue voucher possibilities any longer, based on the information available as of November 1975, and did not attend the CAPE meeting.

Lamborn, Doyle, Diggs, and Parents' Choice staff met on the morning of November 25. Their purpose was to discuss the strategy for the meeting scheduled that afternoon which was to include private school representatives.

Neither Parents' Choice staff, Lamborn, nor Doyle knew very much about private schools in the area or public attitudes toward them. At one point Doyle began looking up private schools in the Yellow Pages to see what kind of educational choices were being offered. The result of the morning meeting was a contract with Lamborn to complete a survey of private school possibilities within two months and suggest recommendations for establishing new private schools if the need existed.

There was no doubt that NIE felt a need existed, not so much based on any consideration or analysis of private school needs at that time, but because of the necessity of passing the legal "diversity" test. Thus, it was clear that the "need" would be for some secular private school.

The cost of flying Lamborn in from Washington several times and of paying several CAPE consultants to do the local ground work would amount to over $9,000. Doyle said in November that NIE could pay for the study if Parents' Choice lacked the funds. Esposito said the money would be difficult to find. However, as the CAPE study developed, NIE found monies that could be committed in the East Hartford grant for such a study. Thus, the funds came from the Parents' Choice Project.

During the afternoon session of the November 25 meeting, Lamborn was introduced to private school representatives as someone who would be conducting a survey of private school potential for the voucher program. Most of the questions were of a general nature, e.g., What would be the relationship between the public school superintendent and the private schools? "Hopefully, none," Diggs replied. Answering the specifics would be the responsibility of Lamborn's study.

The subsequent surveys and press releases accompanying the CAPE study created some confusion about the public schools' role in the private school study. Superintendent Diggs consequently had to reassure the East Hartford Board of Education that East Hartford would not be responsible for the development of private schools, but rather any support they might receive would come through the federal government.

Almost two months after the initial East Hartford talks began, the CAPE study was completed. In brief, Lamborn concluded that there was a large enough group of interested parents to provide sufficient financial support for a nonsectarian private school which expressed a relatively structured educational philosophy. He felt East Hartford offered adequate staffing, space, and support services for such a school and that "the climate within Connecticut, Greater Hartford, and East Hartford seems, for the most part, favorable to such an undertaking."[5]

LOW FEDERAL PROFILE

Introduction

The CAPE private school study represented one of NIE's two distinct interventions into the Parents' Choice Project. Parochial school involvement, and the accompanying legal strategies, represented the other instance in which NIE took the lead to re-direct local efforts. For the most part, however, NIE officials hoped that Superintendent Diggs would be able to build community support for the project and guide through the passage of a positive Board of Education vote. Where more direct help was needed, NIE relied upon its contract with the Center for the Study of Public Policy to provide technical assistance.

Connecticut State Department of Education

NIE also enlisted the aid of the Connecticut State Department of Education. Doyle had initiated voucher-related discussion with Mark Shedd, Secretary of the Connecticut State Board of Education, soon after the Parents' Choice Project began. These discussions led to the awarding of a grant for more than $15,000 to the Connecticut State Department of Education. Particular attention was to be paid to interpreting and applying the voucher enabling legislation (Public Act 122) to East Hartford and other Connecticut towns. The grant also provided for monitoring, evaluating, and disseminating results to the Conncecticut Board of Education and other school districts in the state.

While Parents' Choice-State Department of Education talks began in July, it would be several months before the proposal was informally approved by NIE, and it would not be until December when the professional liaison began working. Little assistance could be provided in this month prior to the final Board of Education vote. At that late date,

5. The CAPE study was submitted to the East Hartford Board of Education prior to the January 26, 1976 vote.

the Parents' Choice staff was not disposed, as one member said, toward "educating someone new about what we've been doing for the last year." While the original idea of assisting East Hartford never came to fruition, the NIE grant to the State Department of Education did publish a report about the policy implications of the experiment for the state of Connecticut. *

Democracy At Work?

NIE officials also worked in shepherding the paperwork through the NIE-HEW maze. The approval of budgets, the satisfaction of civil rights regulations, and the notification of impending deadlines were primarily the responsibility of Ola Clarke, the project officer. Her management of these tasks prevented bureaucratic tangles from developing. Thus, except for the CAPE study, the parochial school concern, the Shedd grant, and the federal administrative details, Parents' Choice was mainly a local project. The federal agency maintained a low profile.

However, NIE staff assigned to vouchers were faced with competing priorities. Most of their activities and responsibilities were generated by the NIE Office of School Finance and Productivity, which was responsible for administering the smaller voucher unit. Thus, the NIE staff were as likely on any given day to be involved in declining school enrollment or teacher salary issues as they were in vouchers. As vouchers were a reduced NIE priority, the staff's involvement in other areas was not only understandable, but necessary to survival in that organization.

In spite of NIE's limited role in the East Hartford voucher efforts and the eventual rejection of the voucher plan, Doyle still felt that NIE had learned much about the politics of education. He concluded,

> "You can't try radical untested ideas in the federal government in Washington unless there's some very present danger or some financial emergency or other national kind of emergency to lead you on. A good lesson to learn from vouchers is that democracy really does work; if you don't like vouchers, you're not going to be stuck with them."

* See Education Vouchers -- A Critical Appraisal! by John Nirenberg Hartford, Connecticut State Department of Education. 52

Chapter 3

Parochial Schools

Introduction
Private School/Public Issue
St. Christopher Middle School
St. Rose Middle School
Organizing Parents
Law Suit Anticipated
Legal Strategy

Chapter **3**

Parochial Schools

INTRODUCTION

The origins of parochial school participation in the East Hartford Parents' Choice Project stemmed in part from the general policies developed by NIE's governing policy board, the National Council of Educational Research. In 1973 the Council resolved,

> "The design of additional projects by the Institute and local participants should include participation by non-public schools in voucher projects insofar as this is permitted by law."

As East Hartford was one of the last two sites considering federal voucher funds, NIE explicitly told them that private schools would have to participate. However, East Hartford's two private schools were parochial schools; therefore, initial private school voucher participation meant parochial school participation. This involvement is detailed within the following chapter.

PRIVATE SCHOOL/PUBLIC ISSUE

Parochial schools were already a "public" issue when voucher talks began in East Hartford in 1973 and 1974. One elementary parochial school had just closed because of a large parish debt (due to the construction of a new convent and other buildings); the public school system had absorbed more than two hundred of these students. More than five hundred students attended the town's two remaining parochial schools -- St. Christopher and St. Rose. Public school officials feared that St. Rose or St. Christopher might also close. Dreading the day when hundreds of parochial school children might suddenly switch to public schools, East Hartford town officials felt they could no longer ignore the "parochial school issue."

With Catholics comprising approximately half of East Hartford's sixty thousand population, with several key Board of Education and Town Council members claiming Catholic constituencies, and with the possibility of additional parochial schools closing down, the parochial school issue was already an item for public debate.

Vouchers were often viewed as a pocketbook political issue. In this vein, Father James Fanelli appealed to East Hartford parents to support the voucher proposal. Fanelli, who was Superintendent of the Archdiocese of Hartford Schools, which included East Hartford, began an April 17, 1975, letter to parochial school parents with, "Would you be interested if someone offered you a check to pay for your child's tuition?"

Freedom of choice was also at stake, according to Fanelli, who said,

> "You have chosen a Catholic school because you think it best for your child. All of us want that choice to continue to be available in the future. As concerned citizens and taxpayers, you are also interested in the public schools of East Hartford and how they serve the children and the community as a whole."

As parochial school superintendent, Fanelli's responsibility included the administration of ninety-one elementary schools and sixteen

secondary schools in Hartford, New Haven, and Litchfield counties -- 36,000 students in all. Fanelli's office developed general policy and curriculum. The local parish schools exercised considerable financial autonomy (relative to public schools) and devised their own admissions criteria. The local parish schools also selected staff, subject to the approval of the archdiocese's central school administration. These staffs were primarily drawn from two teaching orders -- the Sisters of Notre Dame de Manur at St. Rose School and the Sisters of Jesus Crucified and Our Sorrowful Mother at St. Christopher School.

Fanelli was directly accountable to the Archbishop of Hartford. In addition, he talked with or wrote to a number of national Catholic groups. The National Catholic Educational Association, the U.S. Catholic Conference, the New England Superintendents of Catholic Schools, and Citizens for Educational Freedom were all aware that what happened to vouchers in East Hartford might have major consequences for parochial schools across the country.

In late 1973, Fanelli had been more optimistic than other Catholic school leaders about getting a voucher proposal passed which included sectarian schools. Recent court rulings had discouraged advocates of state aid to parochial schools: a 1969 "purchases of services bill" decision had been reversed by the 1971 DiCenso case; a 1972 tuition grant proposal was struck down by the 1973 Nyquist case. * Thus, Fanelli felt he had to rally support of Catholics who might support the voucher idea but feared it would not receive a favorable U.S. Supreme Court decision.

By January 1974, Public School Superintendent Diggs discussed the voucher idea with parish priests and principals. Diggs had been open and informative with parochial school staff and parents about the voucher proposal as far as Catholic officials were concerned. They believed Diggs's parochial school interest reflected a sincere desire to improve all East Hartford schools, not just public schools.

Shortly after the Parents' Choice proposal was accepted in February 1975, Diggs asked the Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP) for advice on involving parochial school staff in the early phases of the planning grant.

CSPP had provided technical assistance to East Hartford with the management of the 1974 Feasibility Study and the writing of the Parents'

* However, U.S. Supreme Court decisions on voucher-type programs have left unclear the constitutionality of proposals such as East Hartford's. See "Committee for Public Education & Religious Liberty, et al. v. Nyquist,

Choice proposal. Don Richard, CSPP's main East Hartford field representative, had worked on various voucher projects, including Alum Rock. The Parents' Choice staff felt Richard could assist in all phases of their work. Another CSPP consultant, Maeve McDermott, S.C., specialized in the parochial school issue. She was on leave from her teaching order, the Sisters of Charity.

CSPP was housed in Cambridge, Massachusetts -- a two-hour drive from East Hartford. The arrangement was made for the East Hartford Parents' Choice staff to telephone Richard or McDermott when they felt help was needed.

In mid-February 1975, CSPP advised Diggs that parochial schools could be involved in a number of initial tasks, such as information workshops which announced the purposes and strategies of the new Parents' Choice Project. Parochial school teachers were legally eligible to receive federal monies for work performed after school. Those monies could also be used to purchase "consumable" materials, such as paper.

While the Parents' Choice organization was still forming, administrators and teachers from St. Rose and St. Christopher schools were briefed in mid-March 1975 about the project by Superintendent Diggs and CSPP liaison Richard.

The March 20 East Hartford Gazette reported the following areas of particular concern to parochial schools:

Legal Uncertainty

Richard stressed that the question of parochial schools' inclusion in the program was open since legal opinions differ as to whether or not they could receive public money in the form of a voucher. If the town decided to include parochial schools, this would without doubt be the subject of a major court test.

Admissions

"It would also be necessary that the parochial school guarantee an open admissions policy while preserving the unique nature of the parochial schools, and other eligibility criteria would have to be met," Richard said.

* (continued) Commission of Education of New York, et al." U.S. Reports, #413. October term, 1972, pps. 756-824.

Tuition

Richard explained that the federal government would pay for tuition through the Parents' Choice Project.

"Our Schools" (information booklet)

The Superintendent said, "One task was immediately assigned to the parochial school teachers, that of writing their schools' descriptions. There is grant money earmarked for revising and updating descriptions of all schools in East Hartford to provide a comprehensive guide as to the total educational choice in the Town."

Throughout the whole project, the public school superintendent would rely heavily upon CSPP and lawyers retained by the school system in working with parochial schools. The major concern was not to violate the constitutional separation of church and state -- an issue which most participants felt would be tested in court if and when vouchers were redeemed by parochial schools.

Fanelli provided legal counsel information and acted as a spokesperson for the two East Hartford parochial schools. However, the finances and policies of these two schools were sufficiently independent of Fanelli's control that, in fact, it would be up to the separate parishes to decide their own responses to the voucher proposal.

Although it was not advertised in public discussion, the leadership of one of the two parochial schools was unimpressed by the voucher program. That school was the St. Christopher Middle School.

ST. CHRISTOPHER MIDDLE SCHOOL

St. Christopher Middle School was built in 1953 largely through the leadership of Father Murphy, the school's chief fundraiser, administrator, mentor, and pastor. In 1975, the one-story brick building housed twelve classrooms, a gym, and a chapel. The 325 students were expected, as one parent said, "to study hard and respect their teachers." The school's tuition was $90 for St. Christopher parish students; Catholic students coming from outside of the parish paid $100. Noncatholic parents paid $150 per student.

The staff of St. Christopher, a parish school, could more easily decide how to spend money than could the staffs of public schools, which had to deal with a central administration and the Board of Education. For example, the school's principal, Sister Imelda, told Father Murphy one day, "Look, we need cassettes, tape recorders and film equipment for a media center." Murphy approved the request on the spot, and $2500 of the parish funds were soon available. Monies were not wantonly spent in the parochial schools, but the attitude at St. Christopher was that money was available when it was needed.

Public monies supplemented private tuition and parish subsidies. Title II federal money (about $350) was used to buy library materials; local funds supported a school nurse who visited once a week and a doctor who came twice a year. In addition, the town helped pay for daily trash collection. Until 1974, the school's hot lunch program had been subsidized by federal funds. About 190 St. Christopher school children boarded busses which also went to public schools. Thus the use of public monies for church-supported education was already an established fact in East Hartford.

It was not an established fact, however, that St. Christopher School would support the new voucher program. The showing of the Parents' Choice slide show at the school's annual meeting in the Fall of 1975 highlighted its questionable support.

Showing a full set of slides was not exactly what Father Murphy had in mind at the annual meeting. Murphy had been asked by CSPP if he would help form a small parent discussion group. Instead, Murphy said that he thought there would be more exposure if the topic were included at the annual meeting where more than two hundred parents would be in attendance. He estimated this would be at least double the number of parents who might attend a meeting devoted to vouchers only. Murphy scheduled vouchers for fifteen minutes, but CSPP came with the Parents' Choice slide show which, along with questions and answers, took forty-five minutes of the meeting time. Father Murphy later said that this time would have been better spent on other parish issues.

In addition, St. Christopher School's leadership was irritated by the content of the slide show. They said they had been told that their school was being presented in the show -- pictures had been taken for that purpose. However, only slides of teachers at the town's other Catholic school, St. Rose, were included in the parochial school section.

Moreover, the only time when the slide machine did not work properly was during the parochial school segment.

The St. Christopher leadership was skeptical about the whole voucher project. As long as they would not have to make any changes in teaching or administration, and as long as they could receive funds, vouchers seemed to be an acceptable idea to them. However, they doubted the possibility of winning a court fight or of avoiding entangling relationships with the public schools. As Father Murphy said,

> "They (Parents' Choice) can never give us a definite answer because the issue is not settled in court. Now, we can't go ahead and really think seriously about it. Until we know it's going to be a reality, we're just going to stand still until something is resolved."

Except for the slide show meeting, several CSPP coffee hours with parents, and a couple of in-service training sessions attended by the school principal, St. Christopher had very little involvement with the Parents' Choice Project. Most of the communications between that parochial school and the voucher project were handled indirectly through Father Fanelli.

As a result, it is questionable whether St. Christopher would have participated during the first year of a voucher project even if the Board of Education received "go-ahead" voucher funds from NIE. If East Hartford was to have active private school participation, it would have to come from the town's other parochial school -- St. Rose Middle School.

ST. ROSE MIDDLE SCHOOL

The St. Rose Middle School included only grades seven and eight when it was built in 1955. By 1957, ninth and tenth grades had been added. However, after East Catholic High School opened in 1961 in nearby Manchester, St. Rose became a middle school with grades five through eight. In 1975, 250-plus students attended the eight-classroom brick building.

A sliding scale tuition was used at the St. Rose school. Parish parents

paid $100 for one child and $50 and $25 respectively for a second and third child in attendance. Parents from other parishes were charged $125, $75 and $50. Noncatholic student tuition amounted to $225 for the first child, $175 for a second child, and $150 for a third child.

The St. Rose principal, Sister Marie Griffin, and her assistant, Father John Conte, were sympathetic to the voucher project, viewing it, in their words, as "a question of freedom of choice and equal rights." By July 1975, Sister Griffin felt that administrative problems accompanying a voucher project could be "ironed out." At that point, many significant administrative issues had not yet been addressed by the project, such as computing the value of the voucher, accounting for student transfers, etc. Most of the substantive voucher information which would eventually reach them was filtered first through CSPP or Father Fanelli.

But information trickled down slowly. For example, the voucher Parent Advice Team had widely publicized the opening of its office in June; as of late July, the St. Rose principal had not known about the opening. The PAT office was directly across the street from the St. Rose School.

Parents seemed indifferent to the possibility of vouchers at St. Rose. A number of reasons for this widespread attitude were indicated by Griffin and Conte: negative newspaper coverage, distrust of the public school superintendent's ambitions, fear of forced bussing to and from Hartford, concern that the school might lose its religious identity, and belief that neighborhood schools would be diminished in importance.

Yet the St. Rose School leadership remained optimistic about vouchers. They had been told that the voucher program had a reasonable chance of withstanding a court challenge. They felt they could administer such a program which would benefit Catholic schools, children, and parents.

ORGANIZING PARENTS

Organizing and informing St. Rose and St. Christopher parents about Parents' Choice was generally the responsibility of CSPP, and Maeve McDermott, S.C., in particular.* McDermott had previously been supervisor for the Sisters of Charity of thirty-eight schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and the Virgin Islands. Prior to

* Although CSPP's parochial school efforts were aimed at getting an informed positive voucher vote, their activities were often initiated and coordinated independently of the Parents' Choice Project.

becoming supervisor, she had been principal of All Saints School in Jersey City. In working with Jersey City parents, McDermott said that she became dedicated to helping poor people. She developed an interest in vouchers as a Washington Intern in Education (a Ford Foundation funded program to place local educational leaders in programs of national policy importance) where she was placed with CSPP. Echoing the 1960s' OEO position toward vouchers, she worked for the voucher program because she wanted

> "to give poor people a choice of schools -- a way to get more control over their lives."

McDermott believed that poor people (including many East Hartford Catholics) feel that "you can't get something for nothing," and that they were suspicious of the Parents' Choice proposal to provide free voucher tuition.

According to McDermott, parochial school parents did not form a clear-cut organizing constituency. Parents from outside the parish regularly sent their children to one of the two parochial schools. As the parochial schools were only middle schools, their children had to attend at least public elementary school (they could later attend East Catholic High in nearby Manchester, Connecticut). Thus, parochial parents were also public school parents and considered Eugene Diggs as their superintendent. Moreover, many parents worked in the public schools or had friends and neighbors who did. In no way, McDermott soon concluded, could CSPP simply assume a distinct parochial school interest separate from public school interests.

Small discussion groups were encouraged by McDermott, who had used that organizing method in Jersey City. This strategy was more successful at St. Rose School, where three groups with a dozen or so parents in each were organized to write pro-voucher letters to Congressmen and Board of Education members. Members of these groups were asked to speak to other parents. One of the women who volunteered was the mother of a student at St. Rose who happened to be Jewish. When she volunteered to talk to other parents, she told McDermott, "You may want to know something about my interest here -- I'm Jewish." McDermott asked why she sent her child to a Catholic school, and the mother responded that her son wanted to attend St. Rose because all of his friends in the neighborhood were going to the school. The child

apparently was pleased with the school and, through a special arrangement, did not receive religious instruction. Organizing Jewish parents of parochial school students was not exactly CSPP's ideal strategy, but it was believed that, in the long run, the uncovering of any parochial school support would help vouchers.

Small parent discussion groups, however, would require more time than the January vote deadline would allow to generate significant parochial school support. The fact that the voucher issue did not strike an immediate and responsive chord with "the parochial school interest" further confounded CSPP efforts. Moreover, the threat of a legal suit seemed to many potential voucher sympathizers to make irrelevant the whole parochial school effort.

LAW SUIT ANTICIPATED

> "The moment the first dime flows to parochial schools, we'll take legal action,[1]"

said Edd Doerr, educational relations director for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Doerr insisted that Roman Catholic school aid would be "totally unconstitutional." Americans United, a nationally based group operating from Silver Spring, Maryland, would recruit a coalition of organizations to join in a lawsuit, Doerr added.

The Connecticut Civil Liberties Union concurred that the parochial school involvement would violate the First Amendment.

> "There would be a good likelihood that we would be involved in the (court) challenge,"

William Olds, executive director, was reported to have said. The CCLU had helped lead a 1970 court fight against a six million dollar Connecticut state aid program to private schools.

In a letter to the editor published in the August 1 Hartford Times, Edd Doerr outlined a number of reasons why the East Hartford School Board should not adopt vouchers. He offered three voucher criticisms:

1. Hartford Courant, April 9, 1975.

"1. Choice is possible without vouchers. Many school districts around the country are offering alternative modes of learning and curriculum elements within the existing public school framework.

2. Popular sentiment is against significant private/parochial school participation in public education. Proponents 'want full public funding of parochial and private schools, a policy opposed by most Americans as shown repeatedly by referendum elections and opinion polls, and by the courts.'

3. The courts will rule parochial inclusion unconstitutional. In repeated rulings in recent years, the U.S. Supreme Court has made it abundantly clear that public funds cannot be used to support religious private schools except in the most peripheral and minor ways."

Doerr concluded,

"East Hartford can expand educational alternatives and improve education without aiding parochial schools and without getting involved in a messy scheme intended by its architects to weaken and downgrade public education."

Parochial school superintendent Fanelli refuted Doerr's charges in a letter published in the August 14 Hartford Times. Fanelli began with Doerr's charge that vouchers were unconstitutional.

"The Supreme Court has never ruled on vouchers. While it has

> struck down some forms of aid, the Court has also approved others. Many legal experts believe vouchers are constitutionally sound. In any case, no one can say for certain, in advance, how the Supreme Court would rule."

Fanelli continued to say that Doerr's charges that vouchers were a scheme to "weaken and downgrade public education" and to finance private schools were untrue. The history of the voucher idea suggested no such scheme. He wrote,

> "The best known proponents of vouchers, such as Milton Friedman, Christopher Jencks, and the Center for the Study of Public Policy cannot fairly be accused of such motives. Neither can the school officials in East Hartford who are interested chiefly in improving public education and in providing choices for parents."

On the issue of public sentiment, Fanelli wrote,

> "The last Gallup Poll on the subject, 'Public Attitudes Toward Education,' published in 1974, indicates that 52 percent of Americans not only approved of such aid, but even favored a constitutional amendment if necessary to permit financial aid to parochial schools, with only 35 percent opposing it. This compares with a 1970 Gallup Poll in which 48 percent said they favored 'giving some government tax money to help parochial schools' with 44 percent opposing."

The Archdiocese Superintendent concluded,

> "The majority of citizens already hold that all children should be treated equally and should not be discriminated against for attending a religious school."

LEGAL STRATEGY

Fanelli and Superintendent Diggs were advised by Parents' Choice Project counsel Russell Post and Laurie Pratt to stress "giving educational choices to parents" even though the immediate issue was parental choice of parochial schools.

Post and Pratt anticipated the court case would center on the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited the state from establishing religion. The critical issue was exactly what constitutes "establishment." The Supreme Court had dealt with several related cases of financial aid, prayer, taxing church property, and textbook aid. But it reserved decisions on voucher-related issues for further judgment.

If, in some way, voucher monies were used for parochial schools, it was believed that the Supreme Court would ask three types of questions:

> "1. <u>What was the purpose of the financial aid</u>? The Supreme Court had already argued that state aid cannot be used to bail out parochial schools that are in trouble financially. The purpose of state money could not be to subsidize parochial school existence.
>
> 2. <u>What was the effect of financial assistance</u>? The Parents' Choice lawyers believed that 'the effect test' would be the most significant and complex question. The problem was, as they saw it, that there was little consensus as to what degree any part of the educational process

influences children's learning. They anticipated that it would be on this soft ground that the legal debate would be fought.

3. Is the State entangled in the affairs of the Church? Entanglement issues deal with the problems of separating church and state. For example, the Supreme Court had argued that public monies cannot, in certain instances, be used for construction of a school gymnasium. The reasoning for their judgment was not that physical exercise was a religious activity, but that the only way for the state to know if the gymnasium was being used for some religious purpose would be to oversee the daily operation of the building -- which would constitute entanglement in the affairs of the church."

Nonentanglement was the theme emphasized by Russell Post at a September 1975 Board of Education meeting. Believing that they were already in a legal situation and anticipating a court case, Post urged the Board to create a "pure system" whereby parents would be given a voucher and begin to exercise their responsibility in the educational marketplace.

From the parochial school point of view, nonentanglement meant that they would not have to change policies or philosophies in order to qualify for federal monies. From the public school point of view, nonentanglement meant fewer administrative hassles. This was thought to be desirable, as Superintendent Diggs repeatedly told his staff that he had enough responsibility without also having to oversee parochial school operations.

The nonentanglement strategy meant that regulations would not be imposed upon the voucher experiment, except for those necessary to comply with state and federal laws. For example, several legal meetings were held in the fall of 1975 to discuss whether or not to expand the area of eligible private schools to all of Connecticut as opposed to just East

Hartford. Parents' Choice coordinator Esposito and assistant coordinator Thompson resisted this idea for several reasons. They were already on public record saying that it was only an East Hartford experiment; the possibility of expanding to all of Connecticut meant the inclusion of Hartford. For many East Hartford residents, the idea of voucher bussing to and from Hartford conjured up the idea of "forced integration."

However, Post and Pratt, and CSPP, continued to raise the area of eligibility issue because they felt it would reinforce the court case by including nonsectarian as well as parochial schools. When the Parents' Choice staff discovered that most students who had already left East Hartford schools were going to parochial schools, the expanded area concept -- i.e., including all of Connecticut -- lost most of its project support, because it would not enhance their legal position.

Superintendent Diggs told the East Hartford Board of Education in September that the costs of defending this nonentanglement model would be carried by the federal government. Without such NIE and HEW General Counsel assurance, East Hartford would not go along with a voucher project, according to Diggs. NIE voucher director Doyle said his agency was willing to budget approximately $20,000 in contingency funds for local counsel in the event East Hartford was sued for including parochial schools. However, the burden of preparing and paying for the case would be handled by the federal government.

From September through December of the fall of 1975, a number of East Hartford legal meetings were held to plan a voucher strategy. Participants in these sessions included public and parochial school legal counsel, NIE, HEW, CSPP representatives and the Parents' Choice staff. These strategy sessions expanded the "give the money to the parent" concept advocated by Post and Pratt.

The legal plan also paid particular attention to the development of private schools within the voucher system. From the legal perspective, it was necessary to show that choice included both secular and nonsecular schools. Otherwise, the proposed system would fail the "effect" test, as the only private school choice would be church supported.*

But these talks were academic. The courts would not test the constitutionality of the program until a parochial school redeemed a voucher. The Board of Education's January 26, 1976, voucher "no" vote meant that these legal strategy discussions came to naught.

* The development of private schools is outlined in Chapter II (National Institute of Education).

Chapter 4

The Parents' Choice Project

Introduction
Project
Project Organization
Introduction
Hiring Staff
Reorganization
Parent Information
Introduction
"Our Schools" Distributed 6/75
Mini-Grants
Introduction
Mini-grants Awarded
Bookkeeping
In-Service
Introduction
In-Service Consultant Selected
Launching the Plan
Central Administration
Assistant Superintendent Departs
Administrative Philosophies
Open Enrollment
Introduction
Opening Up Open Enrollment
Transportation
New Bus Routes Used
Simulation
Speakers Bureau
Introduction
Community
Teachers
Effect
Teacher Opinions
Introduction
NEA Critique
Teachers Polled
Composite Criticism
Popular Opinions
Introduction
Selecting a Consultant
Parent Interviews
Reporting Results
Principals
Introduction
Principals' Vulnerability
School Building Autonomy
Open Meeting
The Vote
Strategy
A Last Look

Chapter 4

The Parents' Choice Project

INTRODUCTION

Parochial schools may or may not have participated; the East Hartford Board of Education could or could not apply for federal funds; and NIE may or may not have been able to provide full voucher funding; but during the development of the voucher planning project, the focal point for voucher activities inevitably centered upon what the public schools did or did not do.

The responsibility for directing the voucher project would ultimately lie with school superintendent Eugene Diggs. Daily responsibilities were the province of the Parents' Choice Project staff as employees of the school department. How the staff organization developed, and the project's strategies to bring information to and enlist support from teachers and parents are chronicled in this final chapter.

PROJECT

The Parents' Choice Project went into effect on February 1, 1975. The $387,371 planning grant from the National Institute of Education to the East Hartford Board of Education was to continue the work begun by the town's 1974 voucher Feasibility Study. The project was scheduled to recommend to the Board of Education by December 1975 whether or

*This chapter examines topics which affected the whole course of the Parents' Choice project. Each subsection treats one of these topics at a different point in time. These treatments are arranged in chronological order.

not East Hartford should adopt a voucher program. If the Board voted to go ahead, East Hartford would use the Parents' Choice Study's technical recommendations in launching a full-scale voucher program for September 1976.

In the first weeks of the project, Superintendent Diggs's statements indicated optimism about Parents' Choice and an eagerness to begin. The February 14 issue of Hartford Times reported him as saying,

> "Our major task is to get more parents involved... We are pleased by this grant and we have already begun implementation of the program. The system, if approved by the Board of Education, could begin operation by 1976."

However, not all town leaders shared Diggs's sanguine view. Democratic Mayor Richard Blackstone, for example, termed the new project "not a reasonable system at all."

In an interview also published in the February 14 Hartford Times, the mayor went on to list reasons for his opposition. Blackstone said he was concerned that neighborhood schools would be impaired and system wide standards would be weakened by wholesale voucher transfers. He also feared financial burdens would be imposed on the town. Most importantly, he felt parochial school participation was illegal. Blackstone said,

> "I just can't believe it's going to be permitted (by the courts). I just can't see where parochial schools can ever be a part of it."

If the Board of Education voted to adopt a voucher system, Blackstone added that he would probably urge the public to boycott the program.

The East Hartford Gazette, which had carried Blackstone's and Diggs's voucher statements, published the entire Parents' Choice budget in its February 27 edition. One week later, the Gazette included an essay by the superintendent which defended the Parents' Choice budget. He also explained how the money might be used to improve the school system

even if a full-scale voucher program was never adopted.

The Diggs essay began with a response to a widely voiced fear that many children would be bumped out of their neighborhood school seats because of "outside" students transferring in. This issue had already been dealt with in the 1974 Feasibility Study, assuring "squatters rights" to children already attending neighborhood schools. Thus, Diggs could flatly state that the Parents' Choice program maintained,

> "A PARENT IS GUARANTEED THE RIGHT TO SEND HIS CHILD TO THE LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL, BUT IF HE SHOULD CHOOSE, MAY TRANSFER THE CHILD TO ANOTHER SCHOOL AS LONG AS SEATS ARE AVAILABLE IN THE OTHER SCHOOL."(Capitals in text)

The superintendent went on to outline four of the project's major activities and their anticipated share of the $387,000 budget.

1. Curriculum Development and Improvement -- $40,000

"The schools in East Hartford should not all be alike because the children are not all alike," Diggs stated in his essay. Consequently, teachers at each school would be encouraged to improve existing programs or develop new ones to best meet the assessed needs of the school children.

2. Staff Training -- $45,000

According to the grant, the East Hartford school staff needed, and would receive, human relations training. Diggs wrote, "Teachers and principals have indicated a need to learn how to communicate more effectively with parents. Workshops will be established to assist staff in relating to parents and children their child's programs and educational needs."

3. Parent Advice Teams (PAT team) -- $59,850

Parent Advice Teams would provide school information for parents. The "Our Schools" booklet, written by teachers and describing each public and private East Hartford school, would be extensively used by the PAT team. The PAT team would also respond to parent inquiries through a telephone answering service. According to Diggs, this was

an important component. Diggs stated, "It is not enough to give parents a choice. They will need better and more reliable information than in the past on which to base their choices."

4. Budgetary Systems -- $95,000

A planned program budgeting system (PPBS) had already been mandated by the State of Connecticut. East Hartford had already met many of these requirements. Diggs was optimistic when he said, "The grant money will allow the school system to accomplish more rapidly and hopefully with more sophistication this task." He noted that this was the best kind of "grant money" in that it allowed the system to do what it would want to do anyway.

PROJECT ORGANIZATION

Introduction

Although in February 1976, the voucher proposal was already being debated in the town's newspaper, the evolution of the Parents' Choice organizational structure was still just beginning. The project coordinator and assistant coordinator had not yet been hired. The Parent Advice Team had not been selected. There were no permanent locations for the project office or the PAT staff. In the next two months considerable attention would be paid to hiring the staff and developing the capacity to plan for a voucher experiment.

Hiring Staff

During the first weeks of the grant, the project hired its first employee, Elaine Dickson, as Project Secretary. Dickson's desk was originally placed in an extra room assigned to state and federal projects in the East Hartford central administration offices. A memo had to be written for a desk which Dickson could use to be obtained from a nearby school. Dickson had worked in the offices of several of the town's schools and previously was project secretary for the 1974 Feasibility Study. Now she answered the Parents' Choice phone, responded to mail inquiries, ordered supplies, and began planning the project's initial tasks outlined in their proposal. Dickson initially worked directly for Superintendent Diggs. Soon several central administration staff began assisting the superintendent in advertising for and interviewing candidates for project coordinator and assistant coordinator.

One of the people who interviewed the job applicants described the process:

> "We wanted a coordinator on board first and then to have that coordinator assist in the screening to select an assistant coordinator. On paper that worked beautifully but in reality we were in such a short time crunch with this that we were interviewing for just one or two days. So when we interviewed, we had a rating scale that we would discuss at the end and we would come up with this man or that man. And that was the procedure we used at that time. But the original intent in the grant was to get the coordinator on board first and then have that individual assist us, but it didn't work in reality."

By mid-March, over a dozen applicants had been reviewed. On March 24, David Dade* was hired as the coordinator; Andrew Esposito was hired as assistant coordinator.

Dade was a native of Massachusetts, and he received an M. Ed. from Harvard Graduate School of Education. He had already expressed interest in working in Connecticut when the Parents' Choice position became available. The fifteen-month post carried with it a $20,000 annual salary. Dade had been Director of Program Development in teacher training in a midwestern gifted child program immediately prior to being hired by East Hartford.

With the new coordinator "on board," the project scheduled an April 3 workshop to brief the Board of Education about the Parents' Choice plans. NIE staff flew from Washington to attend the session.

Hours before the workshop, project coordinator Dade resigned. He had been on the job for nine days.

Dade refused to comment on why he left. Diggs, to whom Dade tendered his resignation, has, to date, not publicly speculated about the coordina-

* Pseudonym

tor's motives. However, Diggs explained several times, "It wasn't a flip kind of thing. It seems to be a seriously considered decision, reached after honest and thoughtful consideration."

The East Hartford Gazette, along with several other area newspapers, had been sent special invitations to attend the workshop which Dade did not attend. The Gazette did not attend either. An April 10 statement by Rolly Charest, the paper's editor, explained why:

> "1. The 'workshop' was not open to the public and the taxpayers.
> 2. Public matters of public importance should be hashed out in public.
> 3. When the usual 'workshop' is over, there is often little left to discuss in public. So when a vote comes at a regular meeting, the whole matter might be finished in minutes -- with the public not finding out who voted how, and why.
> 4. A 'workshop' gives the proponents a chance to 'sell' and, at the same time, 'soften up' the opposition -- all without the public being there.
> 5. A 'workshop' gives poor public officials a chance to hide and deprives good public officials of the proper credit they deserve for a job well done.
> 6. A 'workshop' often produces one group of 'buddy-buddy' pals instead of two opposing parties, each watching the other.
> Let's have fewer 'workshops' and more unrehearsed -- or, at least, unfiltered -- public meetings."

Believing that East Hartford residents deserved to know the reason behind Dade's resignation, an East Hartford resident wrote an open letter to the superintendent which the Gazette published on May 1. The letter articulated suspicion toward the project felt by many East Hartford

residents. "Even though I am not a supporter of the Voucher System for our Town, I think we should not be left in the dark about anything concerning same," demanded the letter.

The writer feared the program could

> "...conceivably...transport every child in the system. Could this program be paving a way for transporting students from and to other towns? Will East Hartford become another Boston?"

The letter continued, "Perhaps someone will see the senselessness of this program." The writer was disturbed that tax money was being wasted both in Washington, D.C. and East Hartford, but felt that the East Hartford problem would come to light.

> "[Then local residents can] put a stop to it before the once called Voucher System now known as 'Parents' Choice' (how clever) can become a reality."

Despite the surfacing on anti-voucher opinions, lengthy discussions with NIE about selecting Dade's replacement were soon held. Previous applications were reviewed. The feeling that they should keep on schedule was the predominant attitude of the school administration at the time. As a result, the possible benefits accrued by bringing in a new coordinator were outweighed by the time which would be lost in educating him or her to the project, already months behind schedule.

By the end of April Andrew Esposito, who had originally been hired as the project assistant coordinator, was chosen to replace Dade. Unlike Dade, Esposito was an East Hartford public school "insider." He had worked for five years in the town's public schools and had been head teacher for the East Hartford Learning Disability program prior to joining Parents' Choice.

Reorganization

By early May, East Hartford had notified NIE about Esposito's appoint-

ment and of new reorganization. Although several contradictory messages had been sent to Washington, the actual reorganization plan contained the following elements:

Project Director: Superintendent Diggs

The title meant he was ultimately responsible for the project. He would act as chief public spokesman, as negotiator with the Board of Education and NIE, and as the number one sponsor within the school system. Diggs did not want the project to be operated independently of his control. "We wanted it to be just like any other part of the school system," he stated. Hence, the people who managed daily activities were directly accountable to Diggs.

Project Coordinator: Andrew Esposito

His duties as project coordinator would include overseeing consultant work and informing parents, school staffs, and the Board of Education about the project's progress.

Assistant Coordinator: Walter Thompson

Thompson, a former East Hartford public school social worker, had earlier applied for the assistant coordinator position. He would assist Esposito and have particular responsibility for the Parent Advice Team.

Thus, the main Parents' Choice staff consisted of Esposito, Thompson, and Elaine Dickson, the project secretary. Two more secretaries and a bookkeeper would be added to work with this staff. Their office was located, along with other East Hartford central administrative staff (including Diggs), in the Woodland Elementary School. A Parent Advice Team consisting of four paraprofessionals would open separately housed offices in June.

The work of the staff, under the direction of Diggs, was mediated by an inner cabinet called the "Executive Board." The Executive Board consisted of Samuel Leone, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; French Hey, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel; Paul Costello, Director of Finance/Control; and Frances Klein, Supervisor of Reading.*

* Klein, who had coordinated the earlier 1974 Feasibility Study, was asked to work as a summer consultant to help Parents' Choice get back on schedule.

PARENT INFORMATION

Introduction

Esposito and Thompson had to play "catch up" for the rest of the project. Neither had previous administrative experience commensurate with his new job. When they began work in April, neither was completely familiar with the voucher concept or the timetable of tasks; it would take months for them to fully understand their overall sets of responsibilities.

However, their on-the-job training developed quickly. Only thirteen months remained on the fifteen-month project calendar. More importantly, the Board of Education was scheduled to vote on whether or not to apply for further federal voucher funding by December. Among the first priorities were the distribution of "Our Schools" information booklets and the opening of the Parent Advice Team offices.

"Our Schools" Distributed 6/75

The "Our Schools" booklet, written by teachers to describe for parents each of East Hartford's public and private schools, had been slated to be published and distributed by the project before public schools closed in mid-June. In order to meet this deadline, principals were told to have their descriptions ready by March 21.

By the end of March, however, the Parents' Choice Project still had not completed its hiring of a coordinator and assistant coordinator. It was Dickson who sent copies of the previous year's descriptions to each school as a guide. The 1974 "Our Schools" booklet had been published the previous year with Feasibility Study funds.

The new booklet, published by the Parents' Choice Project, would also include information about each school's goals, program, staff experience, special programs and services, activities, communications with parents, and physical facilities.

Many of the initial school descriptions were incomplete or vague, describing goals in terms of "helping every child to maximize his or her own needs." As the project was being held up by the delayed hiring and sudden resignation of the coordinator, those descriptions received were simply kept on file in the project office. Finally, an editor was hired to tighten the prose. Meanwhile, printing bids had to be obtained, com-

pared, and approved by NIE as the cost of the booklet exceeded $5,000.

The race to meet the deadline to write, publish, and distribute the "Our Schools" booklet would be met during the last week of school. On June 18 and 19, high school students and newly hired Parent Advice Team members distributed the booklets to the seven thousand households with school age children.

The project was repeatedly asked to defend the cost and value of this publication. The staff responded to critics, saying that parents would need information in order to choose which school would be best for their children. Under the proposed program, the responsibility for making choices -- and with it the possibility for making wrong choices -- would rest with parents, not educators. Information which parents would need to compare schools before transferring their children became the justification for the booklet.

Some parents thought that this information component was primarily intended to help them participate in school decisions about curriculum and discipline. These parents were misinformed. The Parents' Choice Project would carefully limit itself to informing parents about vouchers and voucher-like activities such as student transfers. The "Our Schools" booklet was viewed as the primary means of achieving those limited ends.

Parent Advice Team Opens Office 6/75

One week before the "Our Schools" booklets were distributed, the Parent Advice Team opened its office in a centrally located shopping center. Here, it was hoped, parents might feel more at ease than in a school building.

Recruitment of PAT workers began in April when job ads were placed in local newspapers. The copy ran:

HELP WANTED

"Field workers to work directly under the supervision of parent advice team coordinator. General duties will be to act as liaison between the schools and the community. Must have

knowledge of East Hartford. Length of service 15 months. Salary $2.75 per hr."

Dozens applied. A screening committee consisting of two principals and the project staff queried the job seekers with questions such as: "How flexible is your time? How comfortable are you with public speaking? How well are you acquainted with the Town of East Hartford? Why did you apply for the position of a PAT worker?"

The four workers selected by the Parents' Choice staff and the two school principals underwent a two day orientation session in May in which an "information only" role was heavily stressed. The PAT workers were expected to provide parents with information about the Parents' Choice program to amplify descriptions in the "Our Schools" booklet, and to explain how parents could transfer their children from one school to another. They were not to be advocates for the project.

The new PAT workers were expected to occasionally meet with parents at night and on weekends. Their office was initially to be housed in a school administration building as part of the central Parents' Choice office. However, their schedule threw a monkey wrench into the normal school security policy of closing buildings on weekends and in late afternoons during the week. In order to pay for renting office space in a shopping center with more flexible hours the project shifted funds from their "equipment" account. The new offices opened with ambitious hours: Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon. Meetings were also to be scheduled at other times. A twenty-four hour answering service was also installed.

PAT workers visited all of the East Hartford schools in the Spring and Fall of 1975. They updated information presented in the "Our Schools" booklet, provided coffee and donuts for office visitors, talked to parents at playgrounds, and assisted mothers and fathers in filling out transfer forms.

Yet the potential services of the Parent Advice Team had gone largely untapped. One PAT worker noted that, although she was besieged by interested parents at the community swimming pool and supermarket, few people would contact her at work. In fact, it was not uncommon for the PAT office to go through an entire day without a visit or a phone call. Moreover, those parents who did want to visit, had difficulty

finding it amidst the beauty salons and computer consultants in the shopping center where the PAT office was located.

While the PAT office had been initiated as a service to parents for providing information about the various schools or in the filling out of transfer forms to those who requested their help, its nonpartisan stance was still suspect. As one parent said,

> "I really can't believe that a federally funded project, supported by the school system, would give unbiased information."

The office was disbanded ten weeks after the Board of Education voted to reject vouchers.

MINI-GRANTS

Introduction

By June the Parents' Choice Project was underway. Esposito was now coordinator; Thompson was assistant coordinator. They, with Dickson, were housed in offices one floor above Diggs in East Hartford's central school administration building. Parents had received information about school program differences through the "Our Schools" booklet and the efforts of the Parent Advice Team.

In addition, teachers and school staff were beginning to have some contact with the project. One mechanism for school staff participation in the voucher project was the development of mini-grants to improve existing or to initiate new curriculum.

Mini-grants Awarded

The three page application for a mini-grant requested descriptions of the proposed activity to be funded, statement of purpose, statement of needs to be met, statement of objectives, description of program, procedures for implementation, plan for evaluation, and a budget. Samuel Leone, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, sent the forms to principals and supervisors in late February. The application deadline was March 24, 1975.

No explicit educational philosophy was preferred as long as the mini-grant program could be expressed within the general proposal guidelines. As with the overall NIE voucher program, the Parents' Choice Project stressed organizational diversity. By allowing schools to develop their own programs, the mini-grant process would imitate NIE's "no strings attached" funding policy. The "hands off" attitude also meant that few priorities were clear.

Superintendent Diggs and Esposito did, however, encourage some priorities. For example, the existence of an alternative "radical" high school had already made the system receptive to a "conservative" alternative which would stress the three R's, respect for adults, moral education, and discipline.

In response to newspaper accounts of Diggs's conservative alternative, one parent wrote to him saying:

> "As a very concerned parent who has been upset by the lack of discipline in our schools as well as the sloppy way the children are allowed to attend school, I was thrilled with the possibility that we might have an alternative.
>
> I just hope that those of us who do want 'old fashioned methods' used with our children will get the opportunity to make such a choice.
>
> How can we expect the children of today to respect those in authority as they grow older if we don't start in the schools with the teacher-pupil relationship? Certainly, the primary responsibility is with the parent, but the schools of today, on the whole, are making the job we want to do a lot harder for us."

When the mini-grant application from one of the elementary schools appeared to be going in a "conservative" direction, Diggs and Esposito

requested that the school continue this policy. According to the school's principal, a demerit system was instituted as a result of teacher mini-grant workshops. For example, if a child were late for school, he or she would get two demerits. Five demerits earned one hour of after-school detention. Children who received no demerits for one month or more received certificates for good behavior. Plans were made for the A-B-C-D-E-F marking system, developed in their mini-grant work, to be instituted during the 1976-1977 year. The principal said, "[Without the mini-grant], we really couldn't have gone back to basics the way we have."

By mid-July, twenty elementary schools and three high school departments were awarded $50,000 in mini-grant monies to be used during the course of the Parents' Choice Project. During the summer alone, 133 teachers from 13 schools were being paid from these funds.

Bookkeeping

Two sets of books were used to monitor the mini-grants' expenditure of money. Esposito's preference was that only one bookkeeper, responsible to him, work on the mini-grant. However, Paul Costello, the school system's Director of Finance/Control, wanted the monies accounted for under his central administration department. Neither Costello nor Esposito would agree to relinquish the administrative authority; the solution was for them to keep duplicate books.

The Parents' Choice Project had been established to be more than just a bookkeeper in this mini-grant effort. The plan to develop education curriculum and innovation was, according to the Parents' Choice proposal, intended to "foster decentralized decisionmaking and school autonomy" for each school with the aid of Parents' Choice. But according to project staff and several East Hartford teachers, most school principals simply called in their "best" or favorite teachers, told them mini-grant money was available, and then proceeded to write the proposals with little reference to the Parents' Choice guidelines. There were several exceptions, but for the most part it appears that the mini-grant process did not reflect the project proposal's original intent.

IN-SERVICE

Introduction

Mini-grants were one method involving school staff in bringing about school system diversity. Training teachers and principals in how to maintain and extend diversity through in-service instruction was another. Planning for this training went into full swing by July.

Don Richard, the CSPP East Hartford field representative, arranged a telephone conference call with Alum Rock, California voucher professionals on July 24. The purpose of the call was to obtain advice about how to choose and what to expect from an in-service consultant.

In-Service Consultant Selected

Walt Symons, Alum Rock acting superintendent, told Klein, Thompson, and Diggs that training teachers could not be rushed. He felt that Alum Rock had painfully realized how different "input" was from "decision-making," according to project staff. Symons also stressed the importance of strong top-level support, e.g., the superintendent who could advocate the experiment in the face of inevitable school and community resistance. Symons also suggested that the East Hartford in-service program spend the first six months conducting a needs assessment (to define the particular problems to be addressed in East Hartford). A detailed eighteen-month schedule of training could then be developed on the basis of that appraisal.

Instead of the two-year program suggested by Alum Rock, East Hartford's proposal committed them to a six-month in-service program. The Alum Rock phone call may have lowered some of the project's expectations. But the demands of the fifteen-month proposal meant East Hartford would use as much NIE in-service money as possible within the next few months.*

The recruitment of the in-service applications was the responsibility of Frances Klein, who had been hired as a summer consultant. Don Richard, the CSPP field representative, assisted her and was responsible for soliciting one of the applications.

One of the consultants bidding for the voucher contract was from New Jersey, and might not, in the view of the voucher staff, have been able

* The possibility of emphasizing parent-teacher communication was suggested by Diggs to the project's executive board in late July. However, the board felt it was a "nice" idea but was too large an area to be manageably included in any way during the three-month in-service training period.

to muster enough local trainees. Another pair of consultants emphasized teaching teachers about involvement, whereas the Parents' Choice staff leaned toward the idea of involving teachers in the training itself. One bidder did not show up for the interview after the Project refused to pay him $300 to attend the meeting.

Human Enterprises, a Hartford area firm, eventually won the contract. Their proposal to train groups of teachers in their respective schools appealed to the voucher staff as an economical strategy. The Human Enterprises coordinators, Gloria Fauth and Ted Uhrich, both taught at the University of Hartford and said that they could draw upon many local consultants.

None of the in-service applicants had a working knowledge of the East Hartford public schools. They all subscribed to one or more variants of an organizational development approach. This approach emphasized the importance of a needs assessment to define or re-define problems during the first stage of consulting. In effect, the needs assessment would educate the consultant to the specific problems of the East Hartford voucher project.

In order to prepare the in-service proposal, Human Enterprises met with project staff on August 1 to brainstorm in-service goals. The group generated a variety of responses as to what type of training teachers would need to participate in the voucher experiment. Heading the list were interpersonal skills such as problem solving, listening, and uncovering "hidden agendas." The topics to be covered in the training session did not emphasize information content such as computing the value of the voucher or studying ways to develop an effective student transfer system.

Superintendent Diggs had repeatedly emphasized that the primary objective of in-service training was not to learn more about Parents' Choice. Nevertheless, the overall in-service planning effort wavered between developing ways of helping school staffs to become more autonomous and, as someone close to the project put it, "using the training as a vehicle for getting sufficient support for the program so that we could get a positive Board vote."

Based on their brainstorming session, and subsequent revisions by NIE's Clarke, CSPP's Richard, Parents' Choice's Klein and Human Enterprises' Fauth, the proposal was sent to Washington and approved.

Launching the Plan

Several weeks later, during the second week of school in September, principals and supervisors were informed about how they would be trained to make decisions on their own. They received a printed summary describing a team approach "with representatives from all the schools." Professional staff were to meet with the consultants who would

> "provide them with knowledge about Parents' Choice and the skills to go back to their buildings and work with the rest of the staff to enable the school to begin its planning for successful operation."

Specific dates, more than half a dozen, were included for the team meeting schedules.

When presented with the in-service plan, one school supervisor stood up at the meeting and asked,

> "How can you talk about training us for decisionmaking, when you made all the decisions when we were on summer vacation?"

Afterwards, many other school staff members echoed this sentiment. At the meeting itself, the training consultants conceded, "We had to do it this way during the summer because of the grant's time constraints."

Several months later, Gloria Fauth, the primary Human Enterprises in-service trainer, singled out the rushed summer planning as a major stumbling block in launching the program:

> "It would have been much better to have made a more gradual entry, to have done some interviews with the principals, to get some sort of a sense of what they thought would be useful in their building, to even have

a couple of principals included in designing the thing; their exclusion at that critical entry point was very bad news.

It was justified in terms of time, but in terms of the kind of problems that it has caused us along the way, I would definitely not do that again. I was aware that that was going to be a problem when we did it, but the time constraints to get the fund request into NIE precluded doing anything else about it. We attempted to leave that open-ended and do some negotiating with the principals after the fact. Unfortunately, the fact that the proposal got sent out, and that people began to look at that as set in stone rather than something that could be negotiated around before we even had a chance to meet, made that first meeting incredibly difficult."

Warning about pushing time constraints had come from Alum Rock professionals during the July conference call. But with the pressure to bring about the involvement of the staff and a positive Board of Education vote, the summer warnings had not been heeded.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Assistant Superintendent Departs

While the Parents' Choice staff were developing the in-service proposal, a number of other August decisions were being made. One of these decisions was made by French Hey, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel.

Hey decided to leave. In early August, he announced he was accepting an offer to become the superintendent of a rural Kansas town for the 1975-76 year. Hey had been a school principal in a Kansas school

district where Diggs had been superintendent. Diggs had subsequently recruited Hey to work in East Hartford.

Central Administration had already been depleted several months earlier by the resignation of Benjamin Plotkin as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction (Plotkin went on to become superintendent of a smaller Connecticut school district).

Hey, himself, had not been a voucher advocate. But his leaving further burdened the rest of Central Administration with routine duties. As Hey had not been replaced before the January 26, 1976 voucher vote, Central Administration had to cope with what they believed were their primary responsibilities, of which the voucher experiment never seemed foremost. And, as Diggs had to assume much of Hey's responsibilities for overseeing teacher promotions, hiring and collective bargaining, the superintendent's available time for promoting vouchers was that much diminished.

Administrative Philosophies

Within the ranks of Central Administration, no one consistently championed the voucher cause except Superintendent Diggs. For most of the professional management staff, the voucher experiment was something they expedited because Diggs supported it.

One central administrator had termed the whole voucher project a "time bomb" and counseled other school professionals not to get too close. Another said that in order to become involved in the project, central administrators would have to have some extraordinary "kamikaze qualities." A third administrator tried to distance himself from the concerns addressed by the project by earnestly saying, "We don't make problems, we just solve other people's problems."

But it was Diggs's position that Central Administration did cause problems. He favored relocating as much decisionmaking to the local school level as possible. The rationale for this move toward autonomy developed out of Diggs's own experience. He said, "Having been in a bureaucracy for twenty years and studied how bureaucracies work. I've become convinced that bureaucracies must be restrained." He continued,

> "One way for a superintendent to deal with a bureaucracy is to decentralize in order to keep as many decisions at the local level, or allow the decisions to be made as close to the operational level at which they are carried out as possible. Every time you allow a decision to escalate, to come up through the bureaucracy, the bureaucracy begins to bloom."

As an example of putting this belief into effect, Diggs said,

> "We have fewer central office administrators than when I came six years ago. Much of the authority has been placed with the building principals. They are closer to the operational level than the main office. Accordingly, vouchers, or Parents' Choice, is just a logical extension of everything else we are doing."

As noted earlier, most Central Administration personnel went along with the superintendent's push for decentralization. However, not all agreed with his rationale. Said one administrator,

> "With school building autonomy, what do we need a superintendent for, if each school is going to run on its own?"

OPEN ENROLLMENT

Introduction

The project's course was shaped by August events other than Hey's decision to leave the system for a new job. All East Hartford parents were given an August 1 deadline for requesting transfers for their children to other than their neighborhood schools. Parents of elementary school children had a choice of sixteen schools; at the middle school level, parents had a choice of four schools; for its oldest students, the town maintained two high schools and one "alternative" high school.

The Parent Advice Team had already telephoned by mid-July all parents whose requests for transfers were to be denied because seats were not available in the schools of their choice. Those parents were then asked to try a second choice for a new transfer request. The Pupil Accounting Bureau, a Central Administration unit, was to compile all of these requests.

Opening Up Open Enrollment

Processing requests for student transfers under the East Hartford 1972 open enrollment policy was the responsibility of Ernest Grasso, Supervisor of the Pupil Accounting Bureau. Grasso described the pre-Parents' Choice procedures: "The parent would send me a letter, requesting that, for example, 'I'd like to have my son go from "X" School to "Y" School. I have a sister who lives in that area, and I must work; therefore, my sister will be taking care of my youngster and seeing that she gets off to school in the morning.' I would then call the principal and say, 'Do you have room?' The principal says, 'Oh yes, we've got room.' Fine, we allow the child to come. I felt back then the principal had the authority of whom they wanted and who they didn't."

The Parents' Choice Project had written into its proposal to have the Parent Advice Team simulate new procedures in anticipation of wide spread transfers in a voucher experiment.

Walter Thompson, director of the Parent Advice Team, describes how he wanted the simulation to work:

> "Instead of writing a letter, which is what they used to do, saying 'Dear Mr. Grasso, I would like permission...,' they fill out a form, which the Parent Advice Team made up. Instead of giving them up to September to do this, we set a deadline of August 1, so that possibly we could work things out ahead of time for who they have and who they don't have. Instead of saying to the parent, 'you do this on your own, we're now saying, 'it's your decision, but we're here to help you

with that decision,' meaning that the Parent Advice Team is available to give you information about the schools. In the past, it was just something that the parents could do on their own. If they wanted information, they'd have to initiate it. Now the Parent Advice Team is initiating by providing information to everybody and making people aware that we're here to give more information. So some procedures are different, but the basic policy is the same."

The Parent Advice Team members informed parents about choices available to them in the school system. One PAT worker describes reasons given by parents for transferring:

"The biggest reason is babysitting, and if you couldn't get them into a school, which is what happened with a great number of them, where they would have babysitting services available across the street at a nursery school, the question would be, 'What am I going to do now? What am I going to do with this 5 year old? I have to work and you're saying I can't send him to this school. Where am I going to get a sitter? What am I going to do?'

But I was pleasantly surprised that so many were really interested in the educational process in East Hartford. They often said something like, 'My child is not doing well at this school.' And it wasn't, 'I don't like Mr. Brown, the teacher, or Miss Jones.' It was the whole school. We had a great many people who did go to the

kind of trouble to look ahead and see what these teachers were teaching and how they were great for another child, but they just weren't for this particular one."

The PAT worker's perceptions concerning why students transferred are borne out by a September 1 project report. Proximity of babysitters or day care centers to schools (36 percent) was the most frequent reason given. The preference for a different educational program (23 percent) was the second most common justification. Other reasons for transfer included: prefer my child to have the opportunity to make new friends (11 percent); prefer different school staff (6 percent); moved during the school year and would like to finish the year in that school (5 percent); other (17 percent).

By September 1, ninety-seven of the 146 transfer requests were approved. Thirty were denied because no space was available. Nineteen were delayed until a scheduled October decision because they had applied after the August deadline.

The total of 146 requests represented a 32 percent increase over the September 1974 transfer request figures. Between 500 and 900 students were expected to transfer if free transportation were provided in a full voucher plan.

TRANSPORTATION

When school opened in September, the Parents' Choice Project had made considerable progress beyond the first halting days of delayed hiring and the resignation of the project coordinator. New transfer procedures were being simulated, an in-service training model was developed, and mini-grants were awarded. In addition, the Parent Advice Team had opened its office and an "Our Schools" booklet was distributed. Moreover, the staff was re-organized, and legal, public relations, and research consultants were hired.*

New Bus Routes Used

A transportation consultant had also been chosen to develop bus routes

* For a full account of consultant activities, see Parents' Choice: A Report on Educational Vouchers in East Hartford, Connecticut, Volume I and Volume II, by Andrew J. Esposito and Walter B. Thompson.

for September 1975, as a means of simulating how a computerized route system might work. Both NIE and the East Hartford school department realized the town would benefit from the transportation simulation even if vouchers were not adopted. As children returned to school in early September, their assignments and bus routes were computerized by Educational Co-ordinates, the Parents' Choice transportation consultant. The new routes resulted in the elimination of two busses and an estimated savings of $18,000.

Educational Co-ordinates had worked on the transportation component of the 1974 Feasibility Study. Based on this earlier work, Diggs felt Educational Co-ordinates and the man assigned to East Hartford, David Lovell, had the inside track in winning the Parents' Choice contract.

However, because the bid was over $5,000, federal guidelines required that the transportation contract information be made public.

On April 8, 1975, Diggs had written to Exposito, who had just become Acting Coordinator:

> "Since Educational Co-ordinates did the preliminary work on the transportation research component, it would be of additional cost for another company to replicate the research design necessary to undertake as outlined, while Educational Co-ordinates already has this research design available for which the East Hartford Parents' Choice Program has paid."

But in order to satisfy NIE requirements, Esposito was directed to solicit competitive proposals. In April, at least four firms had been informed that East Hartford was "in the process of designing, simulating, and evaluating computer transportation systems."

Educational Co-ordinates' $13,000 bid was 30 percent lower than others received. On June 2, Esposito wrote to NIE recommending Educational Co-ordinates as the transportation consultant. Based on that recommendation, the Princeton-based firm won the contract and then developed the schedules used for the 1975 opening of school. Final bus

routes, schedules, and bus passes were delivered by Educational Co-ordinates by August 18.

Simulation

If parent surveys were correct, between 500 and 900 children might require transportation to other than their neighborhood schools in a full voucher program. Calculating the costs of different routes could most efficiently and effectively be done by computer simulation. However, East Hartford's bus routes, and assignment of students to these routes, had always been done by hand; therefore, the data was not in machine readable form. Thus, William Curtin, the East Hartford Supervisor of Transportation, had to provide Educational Co-ordinates with information about the school system's pick-up and delivery points, time schedules, and East Hartford and Connecticut school transportation policies.

The transition to computerized bus routes had created initial problems. Identifying these problems was the purpose of this "simulation." For example, some of the newer bus routes which were shorter than old ones took longer to travel because of stop lights, stop signs, and congestion not accounted for in the computer program. Curtin reported that he had received over 200 complaints about delays, overcrowding, and other problems during the first week of school. He estimated that in a normal school year, less than 100 such phone calls would be received. However, Curtin was quick to add at the time, "Any transportation program would have to have some 'bugs' in it when you begin."

SPEAKERS BUREAU

Introduction

The need to bring more information to the public and the teaching staffs had been recognized as a continuing priority in the Parents' Choice proposal.

The proposal called for the development of a Speakers Bureau, the purpose being to systematically expand the initial presentations made by Esposito, Diggs and Klein. However, the formation of the Speakers Bureau was delayed for several months. This delay came about in part because project leaders believed the bureau could be most effective if speakers followed a common format. This common format would include the use of a slide show and accompanying narration. Development

of this presentation was to be one of the major responsibilities of Advocate Associates, the Parents' Choice public relations consultants. However, by the time the consultants were hired in May, it was too late to produce the slide show before school ended in June. Since summer was a time of low voucher interest, the Executive Board instructed the consultants to prepare the slide/narration then and begin the Speakers Bureau in the Fall.

Community

Initially, parent and civic reaction to Parents' Choice had been apathetic and fragmented rather than vociferously for or against the voucher program. Andrew Esposito described the early reaction in the spring of 1975:

> "The League of Women Voters were most concerned with the separation of church and state. At the Slye School PTO they were concerned with, 'How is this going to affect us in the future? As a teacher, will I be losing my job? How much influence will I have as a parent?' We also spoke at two parochial schools, St. Rose and St. Christopher. They had lots of questions on how this would affect them; how much money would they save or not save if they were involved in it; if there was any discussion about schools outside the demonstration district, such as East Catholic (which is in Manchester). At each one of these meetings, a questionnaire was given out so we could tally how the people felt in the audience. The audience usually averaged 60-70 people. The questionnaires came out almost 50-50: 50% in favor and 50% against. We tried to ascertain where they were getting their information -- from the newspaper, from the school

department, which newspaper. The majority of the people we spoke to said that this was the first time they heard of vouchers.

Our conclusion is that they really don't know what Parents' Choice or the vouchers are all about, even though we had a feasibility study within the town."

When parents and citizens did get involved in East Hartford school decisions -- vouchers or otherwise -- it appeared to Parents' Choice staff that they were more willing to criticize than to suggest alternatives or provide positive support. Said one staffer,

"The majority of people in East Hartford may have somewhat negative feelings toward the project, but given adequate information, many of them would change their opinions. Because most of the critical questions I heard addressed to the project really don't stand up -- they are a kind of anxiety question -- questions coming out of not understanding. I don't hear any real questions in terms of hard issues. The teachers wanting to know how this is going to perhaps jeopardize their jobs. When in reality this is probably not going to do that. Or it's parents wanting to know if this is going to mean children coming from Hartford to East Hartford, which this is not going to do. These are questions that I feel can be answered and should be answered, and therefore, people will support the project when given those answers, or will be more likely to support it."

When the Speakers Bureau was finally organized in September, it consisted of four teachers, one principal, three PAT workers, Esposito, and Thompson. Guidelines and instructions for the bureau were provided by Don Richard of CSPP. This training emphasized the importance of discussing vouchers in terms of five components -- parent information, open enrollment, school autonomy, transportation, and private/parochial schools. In their presentations, members used the eighteen-minute slide show prepared by Advocate Associates.* This was generally followed by a question and answer period.

Parents' Choice began to send letters and make phone calls advertising the Speakers Bureau in early September. In addition to school groups, more than thirty organizations such as the Elks, Council of Congregations, Pratt and Whitney Aircraft, and the local office and professional employee unions were notified.

By this time, however, agendas for most Fall meetings of parent and civic groups had already been set. A number of evening coffee hours with community leaders were eventually scheduled, but several of these meetings were cancelled because not enough people were interested in attending them. According to Esposito, three people in attendance was a good showing.

At one of these evening meetings, held at the Parent Advice Team office, invitations were sent to presidents of each of the town's PTA and PTO school councils. One couple attended. In addition, many of the questions raised at the informal meetings were at best skeptical. For example, the parents wanted to know why such a drastic change was being contemplated when New England had a long and successful tradition of public education. Couldn't bussing programs lead to metropolitan bussing with Hartford? (implying a widespread fear that black Hartford children would be shipped into predominantly white working and middle class East Hartford).

The most difficult questions for Speakers Bureau members to answer were those for which answers had not yet been resolved. For example, Thompson stated later (in December):

> "Initially I had no problem with the question, 'Does this mean that our kids are going to be bussed out of town or outsiders bussed in?' I had

* Public relations consultants retained by the Parents' Choice Project.

no problem with that, because it was clear to me that the demonstration area was the town of East Hartford and those schools within the town of East Hartford. However, in fairly recent meetings, it's been indicated to me that we might recommend going outside of East Hartford. That bothers me now because, on the one hand, my answer to the question is still going to be it remains in East Hartford, but I don't like saying something like that, when, as a matter of fact, I know that it might involve going outside of East Hartford. It makes me very uncomfortable -- I'm not happy with it."

Teachers

Speakers Bureau meetings for teachers were generally scheduled to include professional staff from two or three schools, but the turn-out for these meetings was consistently low. At a meeting scheduled at one high school, eight staff were represented; at another high school meeting, no one showed up. The average attendance for meetings in the rest of the system was approximately seven persons.

Speakers Bureau staff also learned that teachers were skeptical of granting too much autonomy to principals and schools. In itself, school autonomy did not mean shared decisionmaking, which was encouraged through Parents' Choice in-service training. However, central administration, in an attempt to woo the principals, had literally told them, "You're the king of the castle." For teachers who were unhappy in this type of situation, few options were available. (Teachers were allowed to transfer. Forms had been developed by the 1974 Feasibility Study to simplify this transfer process; however, due to a central office error, the old -- and incorrect -- forms had been sent to the teachers in the spring of 1975.)

Teacher concern about losing jobs as a consequence of the voucher program was voiced at the Speakers Bureau meetings. According to the

voucher program, a significant number of student transfers from one school might eliminate a teaching position which would have otherwise been secure. The Speakers Bureau could not provide definite answers on this issue since the project had not yet resolved how NIE monies would be used to buy up untenured teacher contracts. Some teachers did not care for this type of arrangement. Not only would they probably lose tenure eligibility but, as one teacher said, "I just don't want to be paid for work I'm not doing."

Effect

The Speakers Bureau apparently did not win over many converts. Those who came to the meetings as nonsupporters of vouchers usually left the meetings with the same beliefs. One bureau member said,

> "I don't feel that we alienated anybody, but I'm not sure we built up a large constituency either."

But he added that the political impact of the bureau might surface if at some later date someone testified to the Board of Education that, based on the Speakers Bureau presentation, they were now in favor of vouchers.

Some effort was made, however, to keep a list of people favorable to vouchers who had participated in a bureau meeting or had written to the project or contacted the Parent Advice Team. The people on this list (approximately 25) were called shortly before the final voucher vote, to enlist their political support. (CSPP similarly contacted their own list of parochial school supporters.)

Yet drumming up public support and winning over converts were not the stated primary aims of the Speakers Bureau. Instead, its purpose was to "objectively" inform East Hartford parents, citizens, and school staff about the strengths and weaknesses of the Parents' Choice Project.

In terms of helping East Hartford residents understand what would happen if a voucher program were adopted, the Bureau was somewhat less than successful. One staff member gave their effort a "C" grade. Thompson added,

"I just don't think the community is that much better informed now because of what the Speakers Bureau did. Some effort was made, but the community as a whole, I don't think, knows a great deal about the project or understands the project. If it were to go operational, I would think we would have to do a great deal more in terms of informing the public."

TEACHER OPINIONS

Introduction

During the Fall of 1975, East Hartford public school teachers became a focal point of Parents' Choice organizing efforts. Considerable voucher planning monies had already been committed for mini-grants -- to encourage teachers and principals to develop innovative programs. In addition, almost 20 percent of the public school professional staff participated in the project's in-service training program which had begun in September.

The East Hartford Educational Association, the local teacher union, had previously gone on record in opposition to any voucher plan. An EHEA October workshop illustrates the thoughts of national union leaders who supported the local union.

NEA Critique

On October 31, 1975, one hundred East Hartford teachers and principals heard National Education Association (NEA) representative Richard Snider call vouchers "bad news" while appealing for East Hartford teachers to oppose the Parents' Choice voucher plan. Snider, who was on the NEA staff for Instruction and Professional Development in Washington, D.C., had been invited to speak by the local NEA affiliate, the East Hartford Education Association (EHEA).

The National Education Association officially opposed education vouchers. At its previous national meeting, the organization passed the following resolution:

> "The National Education Association believes that voucher plans under which education is financed by federal or state grants to parents could lead to racial, economic, and social isolation of children or destroy the public school system.
>
> The Association urges the enactment of federal and state legislation prohibiting voucher feasibility studies and the establishment of voucher plans and calls upon its affiliates to seek from members of Congress and state legislatures support for this legislation."

Snider's presentation was delivered at East Hartford High School on a school professional day when public schools throughout Connecticut were closed. East Hartford teachers were expected to use their released time to upgrade their professional knowledge through voucher seminars such as the one hosted by the EHEA.

The Snider speech ostensibly offered unbiased facts for teachers' consideration. However, the EHEA anti-voucher bias was blatantly evident in the flyer -- which used a Halloween theme to announce Snider's talk. The flyer, Voucher Trick or Treat??, was distributed to all East Hartford teachers.

The complete text was published as the lead story for the next issue of the East Hartford Gazette. Except for several salty asides, Snider's speech stayed close to the prepared text.

The EHEA arguments drew largely upon non-East Hartford voucher developments. According to Snider,

> "It was easy -- and, I think, necessary--to cast the East Hartford Voucher Experiment in political terms, and to trace its beginning to President Nixon's March 1970 Message to Congress.

Flyer Distributed on October 31, 1975

VOUCHER

TRICK OR TREAT ??

TEACHER CONVENTION
OCT. 31, 1975
10:00 A.M. EHHS

Nixon's message had stressed accountability and had greatly appealed, Snider said, to

> "...neo-conservative policy makers in the Nixon Administration who were quick to embrace the idea of making schools (and teachers) more accountable by introducing a variety of business and management techniques into the realm of education."

In this context, performance contracting was touted, along with vouchers, as a more business-minded approach to social programs. Performance contracting, which usually meant the payment of a private contract -- based upon academic development -- had been a "resounding failure." So too, Snider charged, had vouchers been a failure in Alum Rock.

The California voucher program had not fared well for teachers, according to Snider's claim. Using terms like "increased teacher workload," "more bureaucracy," "economic discrimination" and "administrative bungling," Snider said that the whole voucher idea would inevitably lead to educational hucksterism at the expense of teachers, parents, and students. The result would be public schools as "choices of last resort." The East Hartford proposal compounded the problem by introducing parochial schools (the Alum Rock experiment was public school only). Snider implied that this was not only unconstitutional, but would mean less public school enrollment and the subsequent loss of jobs for public school teachers.

Urging the East Hartford teachers to oppose vouchers, Snider concluded,

> "[It] seems that our big brothers in Washington have learned little from their Alum Rock caper, and that they are telling us something less than the truth about it."

Snider's NIE aspersions included gibes at the former president of the NEA's foremost rival, the American Federation of Teachers. After losing the AFT presidential election to Albert Shanker of New York City, David Selden had joined the NIE staff. Selden had written several

articles explaining why he no longer opposed vouchers as he had done as a union official." When Snider realized that his speech might become part of the history of East Hartford vouchers, he specifically added,

> "For the record, David Selden is the Benedict Arnold of vouchers."

Immediate reaction to Snider's speech varied. Several teachers seemed impressed that "vouchers had really failed" in Alum Rock. Pro-voucher teacher factions criticized Snider for understating the local teachers' ability to withstand -- and even gain -- professional authority and respect through school building autonomy.

The EHEA itself was of mixed minds. A standing committee of EHEA, the Instructional Professional Development Commission (IPDC) continued its immediate task of studying the voucher issue. The Parents' Choice office paid special attention to providing information and advice to the IPDC committee. Don Richard, the CSPP representative, spoke to the members about the Alum Rock experiment and the mechanism for developing a voucher program. Several IPDC members said that they felt the Parents' Choice Project had at times been more open with them than Snider or their own union leadership.

In mid-Fall 1975, it appeared that several IPDC members were inclined toward favoring vouchers; however, the union's leadership soon limited the scope of the committee. Local union leadership had invited Snider without bringing the issue to IPDC, according to one commission member. While it had earlier been implied that the committee would make an official recommendation to vouchers, the EHEA Executive Board decided that the IPDC would present facts and not vote for or against the voucher proposal.

The IPDC drew upon Snider's speech, CSPP's presentation, interviews with Diggs and Parents' Choice staff, and a raft of literature presented by advocates and critics to publish a lengthy report. The documents included a textbook-type listing of voucher arguments, pro and con, and a short history of vouchers in East Hartford (apparently based on a Speakers Bureau transcript). The purpose of the report was to inform East Hartford teachers of the facts before their views were surveyed.

* However, Selden did not have operational responsibilities for vouchers within NIE.

Teachers Polled

Following the issuing of the December 1975 IPDC report, the teacher union surveyed its own membership on attitudes toward the five major components of the voucher project. A majority of East Hartford public school teachers had already voted overwhelmingly against vouchers in 1974. Since then, the Parents' Choice Project had held a series of workshops for teachers where a slide show and discussion session were featured. However, the Parents' Choice information and training workshops did not win over the majority teacher opposition which had been evident a year earlier.*

The January 1976 EHEA survey results follow:**

1. OPEN ENROLLMENT:
a policy by which parents can choose to enroll their child in any of the public schools in East Hartford that has an open seat at the child's grade level. This procedure is now being practiced in town under the condition that the parents concerned provide the necessary transportation. Under the new OPEN ENROLLMENT PROGRAM, this transportation will be subsidized by the federal government. In cases where the number of applicants for a particular school exceeds the number of seats available, a lottery system will be employed.

FOR	AGAINST	TOTAL
135 (29%)	333 (71%)	468

2. INFORMATION TO PARENTS:
a policy that would provide information to parents on each school in town through a booklet called "Our Schools" which is distributed to all families, and through the Parent Advice Team, available to consult with any family.

FOR	AGAINST	TOTAL
277 (59%)	196 (41%)	473

3. AUTONOMY (DECISIONMAKING/PER-PUPIL BUDGETING):
a policy that would allow the administrators, teachers, and parents of each school to set priorities and determine the programs and expenditures for that school. All of this will be accomplished within the amounts of money allotted to that school based upon the numbers of

* These findings were generally reinforced by the Parents' Choice Project's professional staff surveys.

** whole numbers derived from percentages

pupils enrolled. East Hartford has been moving toward such decentralization of power for the past few years. The per-pupil budgeting is a system whereby a school's budget would be determined by the number of students enrolled since each child would carry an educational scholarship equivalent to the cost of his education for one year.

FOR	AGAINST	TOTAL
203 (43%)	266 (57%)	469

4. TRANSPORTATION:
a policy that would provide transportation to school if a child's parents choose to send him to a school other than his neighborhood school.

FOR	AGAINST	TOTAL
76 (16%)	389 (84%)	465

5. A) PRIVATE SCHOOLS (any nonpublic, secular school):
B) PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS (any religious associated school):
a policy under which tuition would be paid in an amount not to exceed the cost of education in the public schools within East Hartford. This means that parochial and/or private schools would be granted educational scholarships equivalent ONLY to the cost of their tuition of public school scholarship.

A) PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

FOR	AGAINST	TOTAL
95 (21%)	366 (79%)	461

B) PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS:

FOR	AGAINST	TOTAL
97 (21%)	357 (79%)	454

Composite Criticism

Comments written by school staff at the end of the Parents' Choice Project's survey piece together a voucher-resistant ideology which transcends item-by-item criticisms.

To be sure, teachers opposed specific planks of the voucher program. For some, the idea of school building autonomy ran against what they believed to be the principles of a school system:

> "Concerning autonomy of schools, this is an abdication of authority by the Board of Education, delegating it to parents. A 'school system' should be that--a system, not a gaggle of independent institutions competing against one another."

Anticipation of competition was coupled with a distrust of principals who were to administer the new decentralized programs:

> "I don't think many administrators are aware of, or can handle what an autonomous school is, which involves teachers and parents at the student level."

The in-service training, which was to prepare school staffs to work autonomously, also received harsh criticism:

> "The money that has been wasted on the training of teachers in preparing for the eventuality of this program is appalling! The program was blatantly misrepresented and the people in charge are misinformed."

The superintendent and his staff were not spared by others:

> "There is no such thing as school autonomy as long as central administration sits up in its offices and dispenses rules and regulations."

Moreover,

> "This whole thing is a farce -- another one of Dr. Diggs's crusades."

Another teacher wrote,

> "The project staff did a great job

trying to inform people, but only a few wanted to listen."

One teacher who was sympathetic to the project staff fatalistically commented,

"I have long believed in working for a decisionmaking body that would include administrators, teachers, students, and parents. I'm doubtful that such a body will ever exist at any high school because (1) those in power eventually cling to power, and (2) how can you delegate responsibility?"

Alternatives to Parents' Choice were also posed. For example,

"Autonomy should be teachers electing a principal or group to run a school, perhaps administrative type duties distributed among the teachers, thus eliminating the principal."

During a time of school austerity, other teachers felt that even a federally funded program would be economically unwise:

"Free transportation is nice, but I believe that once the town would have to absorb the cost, the Board would be forced to drop it. Taxpayers would not stand the cost."

Another argued that parochial schools should bear their own costs:

"This whole plan would be a wedge for private and parochial schools to begin to demand for public funds to operate these schools. Parents should have the right to send their children to any public school in town. If they prefer a private school, they

should bear the cost of tuition and transportation."

That monies should be spent on other priorities was a constant school staff theme:

> "How can the school system continue to devote time, effort, and money on a proposed program that has stimulated the interest (not participation) of under 20% of East Hartford's parents of school aged children? Whose interests are best served when money will be spent on workshops, busses, and other items needed to implement such a program while classes are presently conducted without enough textbooks, materials, and other resources?"

Few teachers championed the interest or competencies of parents. Concerning school autonomy, one teacher bluntly wrote,

> "I do not believe parents should have any say in setting priorities, determining programs, etc."

Furthermore, the "Our Schools" booklet, which was distributed to every East Hartford parent, seemed wasteful to some:

> "Why not just give the booklet to those who request it?"

To others it was a farce:

> "It is a clumsy approach to show which school in town is best. It is a booklet of many small verbal inexactitudes that offer lip service to the public. Another example of words speaking louder than actions. This is consumer fraud.

Information had not won over many converts. In fact, some supporters switched sides:

> "Upon personal investigation, from winter of 1974 through now, several other basic contacts, gaining some information, and taking part in some activity, I am definitely opposed to the program in all five parts."

A pragmatic skepticism by some who liked the voucher idea was often voiced.

> "I feel the program would be superb if (1) in reality, there will be ample classroom space for those parents who wish to have their children attend another school (freedom of choice); (2) the program is implemented and doesn't get bogged down at the administrative level (school principal); and (3) if, indeed, parents are fully aware and knowledgeable of their opportunities for their child to progress in this type of new approach."

For most East Hartford school staff, the "new approach" was exactly what was not needed. Many had given specific reasons for opposing the voucher program -- it wasn't pragmatic; the "Our Schools" booklet was misleading; free transportation wouldn't really be free; public monies should not support parochial schools; neither the superintendent nor principals could be trusted; the in-service program had not been useful; and the program might bring about competitions instead of cooperation. One teacher, capturing the feeling of many other professionals who favored Snider's presentation, wrote,

> "I like the old system best."

When Snider had visited East Hartford in October 1975, he commented that the whole Connecticut (and New Hampshire) voucher planning sites seemed somewhat like brush fires, which had somehow escaped the

1970-1974 NEA voucher brigades. Thus, the national organization had spent relatively little effort in monitoring 1975 voucher activities.

But as of Halloween, 1975, the question "Voucher Trick or Treat??" remained very much a burning one for East Hartford teachers and would remain so until the Board of Education vote on January 26, 1976.

POPULAR OPINIONS

Introduction

Bringing information to parents and teachers was a tactic common for both voucher critics (NEA's "Trick or Treat" workshop) and voucher supporters (the Speakers Bureau). The success of these information strategies in winning converts was to be tested by public opinion surveys conducted in December by Parents' Choice consultant Robert Cahill of Behavior Sciences Associates.

Summer plans to survey East Hartford residents were repeatedly delayed by project staff in hopes that public opinion would be more favorable once the project had become more well known. During the last week in November, two-page questionnaires were mailed to each of East Hartford's 18,000-plus households. A stamped, return address envelope was included with the mass citizen surveys. Replies were due by December 5, 1975.

Esposito said in a public statement,

> "This survey is important because it will help determine the future of East Hartford's schools. But it's also important because it's similar to the public survey done in the spring of 1974, when the feasibility analysis was being conducted on whether a voucher system could work in East Hartford. The comparison of the two results will help us get an accurate reading of resident opinion."

Selecting a Consultant

The new public opinion survey included questions about the five components of the Parents' Choice Project: parent information, school building autonomy, open enrollment, parochial and private schools, and free transportation. The inclusion of the five components had come about through the urging of CSPP representative Don Richard. Beginning in the summer, Richard had stressed dividing discussion into these five components instead of entering into all-or-nothing voucher debates.

NIE Senior Associate Robert Cunningham had met with the survey consultant, Robert Cahill of Behavioral Sciences Associates, Don Richard, and Andrew Esposito on October 2 to discuss the sampling methods. (Cahill had been responsible for the 1974 Feasibility Study surveys while working for Heuristics, Inc.) They agreed that as many questions as possible should be utilized from the 1974 Feasibility Study and, also, that the five components urged by Richard be included in the samplings.

In the spring and summer months bids were sent to five survey/research firms. "[Most companies] figured it was much more of an elaborated and in-depth survey than we wanted," Esposito said. Cahill's bid was under $5,000. Other bids were in the $20,000 range.

Three separate surveys were used by Behavioral Sciences Associates. One detailed questionnaire was distributed to all school department staff. As only 573 (54 percent of the total) were returned, Cahill reported that the opinions expressed by the group might not accurately represent those of the entire staff. In addition, the return rate for a brief questionnaire mailed to 18,677 households was an "unacceptably low" 18 percent. However, a third survey consisting of parent interviews was in the consultant's terms "representative of the parent population of East Hartford."

Parent Interviews

Parent interviews were conducted by ten temporary employees who were given names of fifty randomly selected families within a specific area of town. The total stratified random sample included 500 East Hartford families with children enrolled in public, private or parochial schools. 416 or 83% of the sample actually participated in the survey.

The interviewers were given a one-day training session by Cahill. They were told to explain only the purpose of the survey, and not to bias results by helping parents with the substance of the questions.

Jewell Plotkin coordinated the interviewers. Her responsibilities included checking the forms for completeness, assigning new names when the computer selection erred, and talking every night by phone with each of the interviewers to review the day's work.

The interview results were as follows:*

OPEN ENROLLMENT:
a policy by which parents can choose to enroll their child in any public school in East Hartford that has an open seat at that child's grade level.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
92 (22%)	200 (48%)	87 (21%)	37 (9%)	416

TRANSPORTATION:
a policy that would provide transportation to school if a child's parents choose to send him to a school other than his neighborhood school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
67 (16%)	150 (36%)	116 (28%)	83 (20%)	416

INFORMATION TO PARENTS:
a policy that would provide information to parents on each public school in the town through a booklet called "Our Schools" which is distributed to all families, and through Parent Advice Teams, available to consult with any family.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
96 (23%)	266 (64%)	37 (9%)	17 (4%)	416

* whole numbers derived from percentages

PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS:
a policy that would pay tuition in an amount not to exceed the cost of education in the public schools for any East Hartford child attending a private or parochial school within East Hartford.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
92 (22%)	141 (34%)	108 (26%)	75 (18%)	416

AUTONOMY OF SCHOOLS:
a policy that would allow Administrator, Teacher, and Parent of each school to set priorities and determine the programs and expenditures for that school, within the amount of money allotted to that school based on the number of pupils.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
79 (19%)	224 (54%)	71 (17%)	42 (10%)	416

Parent Comments

Parent comments written at the end of the interviews suggest a wide range of opinions which elude easy tabulation. Among those which appeared not to favor the voucher project were comments such as,

> "I agree to most of this (survey), but I am not in favor of government giving us money. I feel we as taxpayers should keep control as we are doing now. No government help should be needed."

The parochial school issue was pinpointed by many as their reason for opposition. One parent flatly said,

> "I believe no public money should be provided for private or parochial schools."

However, among those who favored the voucher project, the possibility of parochial school inclusion was often a prime factor. On this church/state issue, one parent wrote,

> "I feel that the public school that my children have attended in East Hartford is a very good school. I am very much in favor of a policy that would pay the tuition to a parochial school if I choose to send my children to one. I feel that should be my right as a taxpayer in East Hartford."

The philosophy of Parents' Choice was expressed by one parent's account of her daughter's schooling,

> "I feel the parents should have a voice in their child's education. I have only observed my child in her present school. I would change her to another school only if I felt that school could best educate her. Problem children need help, and they should get it if another school can aid them. Sometimes circumstances, such as a working mother who needs day care assistance, are prime factors."

One parent believed that transportation should be provided to make choices possible, but only "if it does not burden the taxpayer."

Reporting Results

Interviewers reported a number of survey questions that seemed contradictory or illogical. They also said that many parents felt the general tone of the survey was geared to make them "favor vouchers more than they actually did." Other parents, like the mother who slammed the door in an interviewer's face when she was told it was a Parents' Choice survey, simply would not cooperate.

A few of the interviewers felt some of these questions forced unrealistic choices.

Question #16 illustrates this problem:

> "The proposed Parents' Choice Project would allow parents to select the school best suited for their child. I, therefore, favor this idea for East Hartford."

Several parents responded to this question with the following attitude,

> "I may understand that the Parents' Choice program may allow parents more freedom of selection. So my answer to the first part of the question is yes. But it does not follow that I favor the idea for East Hartford."

For these parents, understanding the Parents' Choice idea did not mean agreement with the idea. However, since Question #16 joined understanding and agreement statements, these parents were offered the unsatisfying response of only "Yes" or "No."

Parents' Choice Project staff were aware of some of these survey problems. Nevertheless, a January 15, 1976, press release quoted Esposito,

> "The survey taken in the homes of parents appears to be the most accurate. It also indicated a positive response from parents, the group which must be involved if education vouchers are to have a chance of improving education for East Hartford school children."

PRINCIPALS

Introduction

A ballot taken by the East Hartford principals at one of their weekly sessions (January 16, 1976) resulted in an 18-0 anti-voucher stand.

The town's nineteen public school principals* would have carried much of the responsibility for implementing the proposed voucher program's curriculum diversity and school building autonomy. During the 1974 voucher Feasibility Study, a number of the town's principals had supported a petition opposing further voucher study.

The East Hartford Gazette trumpeted the principals' unanimous opposition in front page headlines just prior to the final Board of Education voucher vote. According to several "swing-vote" Board members, the principals' positions sealed the Parents' Choice fate.

Principals' Vulnerability

Many principals said their vote was misinterpreted. They claimed they supported several Parents' Choice components, e.g., parent information, but felt the ballot's wording (borrowed from a teacher union survey) meant they had to vote against the whole proposal if they disagreed with any part of it. However, when the public and the Board of Education discussed the meaning and implications of the 18-0 vote, no principals came forth to testify or interpret the "real meaning" of the vote.

The Gazette quoted one principal as saying,

> "The matter of the voucher was linked in with a question on autonomy. So, to vote against the voucher, we had to vote against autonomy, even though there is much school autonomy now, and we are for it."

The principal added,

> "But the voucher was a different matter. That we didn't want."

The principals missed a great opportunity, according to Parents' Choice proponents, soon after the Board of Education's January 26 vote to reject vouchers. One project staffer remarked.

> "Vouchers would have clearly given more power to principals by decentralizing decisionmaking."

*One principal was traveling out of state during the vote.

But, it was charged that the responsibility that accompanied the decentralization of power alarmed principals more than the voucher procedures.

At the same time, voucher critics were also taking aim at the principals. Arguments for the "one best system" were in vogue the night vouchers were voted down. The idea of "one best system" also implied that responsibility for programs and policies would be synchronized through the Board of Education and central administration, thereby restricting the ability of principals and teachers "to go on their own."

The principals' vulnerability surfaced at several points. The example of school building autonomy was one such instance.

School Building Autonomy

With the superintendent fostering the idea of school building autonomy, it soon became clear that the question of how much authority principals would have over their own building had to be answered. For example, in East Hartford, central system supervisors had control over music, art, reading, and special education specialists. The supervisors would place, schedule, and evaluate their staff; most of this staff spent only a fraction of their time in any one school. But when the specialist was in any one of the schools, to whom would he be responsible? In a traditional centralized system the answer had usually been clear--the specialist was responsible directly to his supervisor. But, with the possibility of expanded school building autonomy, perhaps the specialist and the supervisor would be accountable to the principals. Thus, when a music teacher entered an East Hartford elementary school, his or her boss would be that school's principal. And the person who had previously been a supervisor might then assume a new role as coordinator and principal's advisor.

The supervisor-principal tug of war was but one of dozens of school building autonomy issues addressed by East Hartford staff. The superintendent clearly wanted more and more decentralization at the school building level, but the efforts to gain consensus on how that was to be done had not achieved notable success.

The responsibility for training East Hartford staff to "operationalize" school building autonomy had been a primary concern of the Parents' Choice in-service consultants. Principals who were disposed toward

the voucher concept were best able to apply the in-service training. Remarked one consultant,

> "In the cases where principals are very willing to really examine what's going on in their buildings, are anxious to get a better handle on it, are enthusiastic about the notion of functioning more autonomously, and are not particularly threatened by any of that, they tend to have been very supportive of the training process."

Many school principals, however, were unsure about the responsibilities they would have through school autonomy. For example, one principal said,

> "I don't want to negotiate teacher contracts. Let the superintendent and Board of Education do that."

However, school-by-school labor negotiations were of no interest to Central Administration. Another principal said,

> "I would like to have more control over maintenance. When a window is broken in my school, I just can't go out and get a low bid and repair it the next day."

To obtain maintenance work under their present system, the principals were required to fill out forms and send these forms to the central office, which would then seek competitive bids. Principals complained that in extreme cases it would take weeks or even months to have an item repaired. However, making maintenance a school autonomy issue would eliminate the Central Administration's authority over maintenance -- something which Diggs was not willing to consider. Thus, while some principals wanted more maintenance autonomy, they were not to be granted that privilege.

In addition, many principals who did have vacancies in their schools said that they already had "parents' choice," meaning that parents could

exercise the open enrollment policy to transfer their children from one school to another. In this perspective, the voucher program simply meant providing the money to transport children to nonneighborhood schools. There seemed to be little consideration in these cases of the voucher theory's interest in school building autonomy, curriculum diversity, or giving parents a say in school policymaking.

One principal frankly admitted that he had little faith in parents as educational consumers.

> "[With a voucher program], parents would choose with their eyes, not with their heads,"

he said, implying that parents would be more impressed with new school buildings and facilities than with what was being taught and how it was taught. Thus, parents would shy away from "good" programs in old school buildings. This principal believed that the "Our Schools" booklet would probably not help parents use their heads because "they don't read anything anyway."

Yet without the possibility of vouchers as well as parent leverage over the principals and schools, the superintendent was reluctant to grant as much autonomy as he had hoped to give the schools before January 26. Just how much school autonomy would be retained by principals remained an issue as this history was being written. However, it is clear that the inability to arrive at a workable understanding of school building autonomy directly contributed to the principals' critical 18-0 vote in opposition to vouchers.

OPEN MEETING

By mid-January, it appeared that little could be done by voucher advocates or critics to fundamentally shift public opinion in any substantial way. The January 21, 1976, Open Meeting reflected the range of these opinions.

Over 120 East Hartford residents and all nine Board of Education members gathered in the Penney High School auditorium for an Open Meeting concerning the proposed voucher program. During the three and one-half hour session, fifty-five residents testified: twenty-three favored the proposed program; thirty-two opposed it.* At the later

* The historian's estimates are based on explicit statements.

January 26 Board of Education meeting vote, several members referred to the Open Meeting testimony as evidence that (1) a majority of the townspeople opposed the project and (2) wide disagreement existed on specific issues.

This January 21 meeting was the last opportunity for public voucher testimony. People testified according to a list they signed when they entered. The pro and con comments often came in bunches, as like-minded friends entered the auditorium together.

Several parochial school voucher supporters signed in first. It appeared through the first hour that the town strongly supported the voucher program. After the first thirteen testimonies, the unofficial score card was nine pro vouchers and four against. However, of the remaining forty-two speakers, twenty-nine opposed the voucher program.

The political effect of such an Open Meeting was difficult to ascertain. However, one Board of Education member did say during a coffee break that his mind was already made up and public testimony was just not going to make him change. He was a certain "No" vote. When asked if he felt that Open Meetings were ever of use, he answered in the affirmative. In fact, public testimony had recently influenced his decision to vote against the superintendent's proposal to close several elementary schools due to declining enrollment. Prior to that Open Meeting this Board member admitted his mind had not been made up about school closings. But he stressed that more information would not change his mind about Parents' Choice. He agreed to listen, but stated that vouchers would still get his "No" vote.

The arguments at the Open Meeting revolved around the following issues:

Comments at Open Meeting/January 21, 1976

	Positive	Negative
Federal Government	"We've tailored the federal program to our own needs."	"The feds may back out after just one year." "What is NIE's ulterior motive?"
Priorities	"Involving parents, making schools more diverse, and accountability are critical problems."	"Let's stress the 3 R's." "What are we doing about vandalism?"
Change	"How do we know if it will work unless we try it?" "Anything that will benefit children is worth the struggle."	"Only 15% may transfer — may upset the whole system."
Pragmatic	"Could work like the G.I. Bill." "Only 15% of the students in the system may transfer."	"It's a good idea in principle, but it won't work if teachers and principals oppose it."
Personality	"We have the people here to implement the program."	"This is Diggs's choice, not Parents' Choice."
Philosophic	"No school is all things to all children." "Voucher expenditures would make schools more accountable."	"Let's give all kids the same opportunity." "Educators know more than parents."
Church/ State	"The courts could find parochial school involvement constitutional." "All children have the right to free education."	"Oppose the use of public money for church schools." "It would not stand up in court."
Education	"Diversity and choice are essential for a public school system."	"It does not guarantee better schooling." "Cooperation, not competition is what we need."
Economic	"Consultant studies show costs after five years would be negligible; for the first five years the federal government will pay for voucher-related costs."	"Taxes will rise."

THE VOTE

Strategy

The Board of Education had been swamped with consultant reports, testimonies, newspaper inquiries, letters, and phone calls prior to its final January 26 voucher vote. On January 17, the Board held an all-day Saturday open hearing to question the reports submitted by consultants hired by the Parents' Choice Project. These reports focused on the legal, public opinion, transportation, and economic accounting aspects of the voucher plan.* One Board member said, "No one could say that we did not have enough information to vote on."

Several days later, more than 200 East Hartford residents had attended the Open Meeting where more than sixty people testified for or against the proposal. During this period, three area newspapers published editorials. The two Hartford metropolitan newspapers favored the project; the local East Hartford paper vehemently rejected the proposal, as it had opposed vouchers for three years. The Board members were also besieged by dozens of letters and phone calls on nights and weekends as the vote grew nearer.

An agenda for the January 26 vote had been developed by the superintendent and distributed to Board members three days prior to the vote. The Parents' Choice Project had wanted the Board members to consider and vote upon each of the five components separately, i.e., private and parochial schools, open enrollment, transportation, budgeting procedures, and parent information. Each of the five components included a list of options: for example, the private and parochial schools component could have included only public, parochial, and private schools in East Hartford; or, if the Board so wished, the boundaries could have been extended to public, private, and parochial schools in the state of Connecticut.

The project staff hoped that with nine Board members voting on five separate components, each with its own options, the strategy would defuse "all or nothing" Board member positions. Throughout the project, voucher supporters had pinned their hopes on "reasonable" people agreeing with them after looking at the "facts" of each component. They feared that emotional appeals to the voucher idea would result in its popular rejection.

*See Parents' Choice: A Report on Educational Vouchers in East Hartford, Connecticut, Volume I and II, by Andrew J. Esposito and Walter B. Thompson, East Hartford Public Schools.

However, the Parents' Choice position toward the components was altered shortly before the final vote. The five components were still to be discussed; but first, the Board was to vote on a tabled 1973 policy to "develop and test educational scholarships as established in Public Act 122 in the State of Connecticut." As a result, the Board would first, in effect, vote yes or no on voucher policy. If it was yes, they would then evaluate each of the voucher options.

Speculation on the Board's vote had, by this time, become a local pastime. Project staff feared they might lose 5-3, but hoped one of the "swing" votes would go their way, thereby giving an opportunity for the chairperson to break a 4-4 tie in their favor. Federal representatives were optimistic, but admitted this was based more on hope than on facts relayed back to them in Washington. School superintendent Diggs, who had initiated and backed the proposal, confided on the day of the vote that the Parents' Choice proposal didn't seem to have enough Board member support to pass. The Hartford Times predicted there would be two assured "yes" votes and two assured "no" votes. The paper was correct. Five publicly uncommitted votes remained when chairperson Kepler called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. on January 26, before 200 people at the Penney High School amphitheater.

A Last Look

As the project staff looked back at their past actions just minutes before the final Board vote, it seemed a "miracle" that they had survived up to the vote. All along the way potential "knock-out" blows had been somehow averted. The project had continued in spite of the resignation of the first coordinator after being on the job only nine days. Opposition by the town's mayor had not created a favorable climate for the burgeoning proposition. Strong and widespread community and school staff resistance had never been rooted out. Expected parochial school support never materialized to encourage the project. At times it even appeared that NIE might not have the funds even if East Hartford voted to begin a full-fledged voucher experiment. Yet somehow the project staff had managed to sustain Parents' Choice as a viable entity to be presented to the Board.

The tally was 6-2 against vouchers.* With that vote, the possibility for an East Hartford education vouchers experiment came to the end.

*See "The Vote," in Chapter I.

Appendices

A: Basic Contact Information
B: Major Participants
C: Brief Chronology
D: Acronyms

Appendix A

Basic Contact Information

Meeting notes refer to observations of public and staff meetings which were scheduled independently of the historian. The length of these events ranged from 30 minutes to eight hours.

Interview notes refer to interviews which were scheduled in advance and usually lasted 30 minutes to an hour.

Conversation notes refer to unscheduled conversations during which no records were kept. Written notes or dictated accounts were completed the day of the conversation.

Transcript interviews refer to scheduled interviews where a cassette tape recorder was used and the material later transcribed.

Frequency

41 site visits were taken to East Hartford between June 24, 1975, and May 17, 1976. Several additional trips were taken to Washington, D. C., New Hampshire, and Cambridge, MA.

The frequency of types of information gathered from June 24, 1975 - May 17, 1976, was as follows: meeting notes, 29; interview notes, 22; conversation notes, 15; transcript interviews, 17.

Trip Reports

June 1975	
24	Central Administrators (conversation notes)
July 1975	
2	Parents' Choice Executive Board -- (meeting notes) Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes) Central Administrator

July 1975	
10	Supervisor (transcript interview)
17	Cab driver (conversation notes) Parents' Choice Staff (transcript interview, conversation notes) Parochial School Staff (interview notes)
24	Parents' Choice Executive Board -- in-service (meeting notes)
28	Parochial School Staff (interview notes) Parents' Choice Executive Board (meeting notes) Parents' Choice Staff (interview notes)
August 1975	
1	In-service training (meeting notes)
6	Parents' Choice Executive Board (meeting notes) Principal (interview notes)
15	Parochial School Staff (interview notes)
18	Board of Education (meeting notes) Parents' Choice Staff (transcript interview)
September 1975	
2	Board of Education (meeting notes)
3	Parent Advice Tean (transcript interviews) Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
8	Board of Education (meeting notes) Central Administrator (transcript interview)
10	Administration and Supervisors' in-service (meeting notes)

September 1975	
10	Parents' Choice Executive Board (meeting notes)
15	Board of Education (meeting notes) Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
18	Central Administration -- in-service (meeting notes)
25	National Institute of Education Staff (transcript interviews and interview notes)
30	Administrators and Supervisors -- (meeting notes)
October 1975	
2	Supervisor (transcript interview) Consultant (meeting notes)
8	Central Administrator (transcript interview) Teacher Union (meeting notes)
16	In-service Team (meeting notes)
30	Principal (interview notes) Central Administrator (interview notes) Private school (meeting notes)
31	National Education Association (meeting notes) Center for the Study of Public Policy Staff (conversation notes) Parent Advice Team (conversation notes)
November 1975	
10	Principals (interview notes) Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
13	Teacher Information Meeting (meeting notes) In-service -- (meeting notes) Parent Advice Team (meeting notes)
21	Legal Issues (meeting notes)
25	New School Meeting (meeting notes)

December 1975	
3	Parochial School Staff (interview notes) Administrators' and Supervisors' in-service (meeting notes) Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
5	Newspaper editor (interview notes) Consultant (transcript interview) Part-time employee (interview notes) Teacher union leader (interview notes)
12	Center for the Study of Public Policy Staff (interview notes)
15	Board of Education (meeting notes) Parents' Choice Staff (transcript interview) Part-time employee (interview notes)
18	Board of Education Member (interview notes) Central Administrator (interview notes) Principal (interview notes) Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
January 1976	
7	Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
16	Legal meeting (meeting notes)
17	Board of Education (meeting notes)
21	Open Meeting (meeting notes)
23	Parents' Choice Staff (conversation notes)
26	Board of Education (meeting notes)
27	Executive Board (meeting notes) Teacher (transcript interview)
February 1976	
4	Parents' Choice Staff (transcript interview)

February 1976	
9	National Institute of Education Staff (transcript interview)
18	Professional Staff (meeting notes)
March 1976	
10	Center for the Study of Public Policy Staff (interview notes)
18	New Hampsnire Voucher Project Office Staff (meeting notes)
20	Salem, New Hampshire -- (meeting notes)
31	Central Administrator (interview notes)
May 1976	
17	Parents' Choice Staff and Central Administrators (interview notes)

Appendix B

Major Participants

Atwood, Barbara
East Hartford Board of Education Member

Bannon, Robert
East Hartford Board of Education Member
Blackstone, Richard
East Hartford Mayor

Cahill, Robert
Behavioral Sciences Associates, Survey Consultant
Charest, Rolly
East Hartford Gazette, Editor
Clarke, Ola
National Institute of Education, East Hartford Project Officer
Cleveland, James
New Hampshire Congressman
Conte, Father John
St. Rose School, Administrator
Costello, Paul
East Hartford Public Schools, Director of Finance/
Cotter, William R.
Connecticut Congressman for East Hartford
Cunningham, Robert
National Institute of Education, Senior Associate
Curtin, William
East Hartford Public Schools, Director of Transportation

Dade, David
Parents' Choice Project, Original Coordinator
Dakin, James
East Hartford Education Association, President
Daley, Richard
East Hartford Board of Education Member
Daly, Emery
East Hartford Board of Education Member

Daly, Mary
Montessori School of Greater Hartford, Director
Del Ponte, Lawrence
East Hartford Board of Education Member
Dickson, Elaine
Parents' Choice Project, Secretary
Diggs, Eugene
East Hartford Public Schools, Superintendent of Public Schools
Doerr, Edd
Americans United, Educational Relations Director
Doyle, Denis
National Institute of Education, Chief of School Finance and Organization Division

Esposito, Andrew
Parents' Choice Project, Coordinator

Fanelli, Father James
Hartford Archdiocese Schools, Superintendent
Fauth, Gloria
Human Enterprises, Coordinator of In-service Training

Grasso Ernest
East Hartford Public Schools, Supervisor of Pupil Accounting Bureau
Griffin, Sister Marie
St. Rose Middle School, Principal

Hey, French
East Hartford Public Schools, Former Assistant Superintendent for Personnel
Hodgkinson, Harold
National Institute of Education, Director

Imelda, Sister M.
St. Christopher Middle School, Principal

Kepler, Eleanor
East Hartford Board of Education, Chairperson
Klein, Frances
1974 Feasibility Study, Director
East Hartford Public Schools, Supervisor of Reading

Lamborn, Robert
Council on American Private Education (CAPE), President
Leone, Samuel
East Hartford Public Schools, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Lovell, David
Educational Co-ordinates, Transportation Consultant

McDermott, Maeve
Center for the Study of Public Policy, Field Representative
Miles, Walter
East Hartford Board of Education Member
Murphy, Father Henry J.
St. Christopher's Parish, Pastor

Plotkin, Jewell
Project Coordinator of Parent Interviewers
Post, Russell
Post & Pratt, Attorneys at Law, Project Legal Counsel
Pratt, Laurie
Post & Pratt, Attorneys at Law, Project Legal Counsel

Richard, Donald
Center for the Study of Public Policy, Field Representative
Ruggles, Joyce
East Hartford Board of Education Member

Shedd, Mark
Connecticut State Department of Education, Secretary of Education

Snider, Richard
National Education Association (NEA), Representative

Symons, Walter
Alum Rock School District, Acting Superintendent

Thompson, Walter
Parents' Choice Project, Assistant Coordinator

Veltri, Richard
East Hartford Board of Education Member

Appendix C

Brief Chronology

1969

CSPP contracted by OEO to study voucher options

1970

Diggs appointed East Hartford Superintendent
Publication of Education Vouchers: A Report on Financing Education by Grants to Parents by CSPP

1972

Open enrollment approved by East Hartford Board of Education

1973

OEO disbanded
NIE inherits vouchers
National Council of Educational Research resolves that NIE voucher experiment includes private schools
East Hartford - CSPP workshops
East Hartford Board of Education approves possibility of studying vouchers

1974

Three month Feasibility Study
Board of Education votes 5-4 to apply for voucher planning grant
Congress delays funding for NIE -- East Hartford funding in limbo

1975

Parents' Choice proposal revised by Diggs, CSPP and NIE representatives

FEBRUARY 1975

East Hartford awarded $387,371 grant by NIE for Parents' Choice Project
Diggs asks CSPP to help involve parochial school staff in early planning stages
Dickson hired as project secretary

MARCH 1975

Diggs essay explaining Parents' Choice published in East Hartford Gazette
Briefing of parochial school staff by Diggs and Richard

MARCH 1975

Dade hired as Coordinator
Mini-grant application deadline

APRIL 1975

Dade resigns
Doyle assures Board of Education that NIE would be "foolhardy" to refuse "sound proposal"
Americans United for the Separation of Church and State threatens court fight
Clarke letter to Diggs urging private new school development
Fanelli sends letter explaining and supporting voucher project to parochial school parents
Parent Advice Team worker applicants interviewed

MAY 1975

NIE notified of appointment of Esposito (coordinator) and Thompson (assistant coordinator)
Klein to become summer consultant
Executive Board formalized
Four PAT workers receive orientation
"Our Schools" printed
Diggs asked for NIE pledges of funding assurances
Project presents voucher idea at several community/school meetings
Hodgkinson sworn in as NIE Director

JUNE 1975

Public relations, transportation and research consultants selected
Distribution of "Our Schools" booklet
Parent Advice Team opens offices in shopping center
Historian begins site visits

JULY 1975

Mini-grants awarded
Post and Pratt begin stressing parochial school non-entanglement
Conference call to Alum Rock concerning teacher training
Human Enterprises hired as in-service consultant

AUGUST 1975

Deadline for student transfer requests
Hey resigns as Assistant Superintendent
Fanelli-Doerr parochial school debate
Educational Coordinates delivers computerized bus routes
Cunningham memo preferring East Hartford over New Hampshire
East Hartford and CSPP lobbying to secure NIE funds
In-service Proposal approved by NIE

SEPTEMBER 1975

Transfer Report published
NIE takes wait-and-see funding position
Meeting between Doyle, Cunningham and Cohen (CSPP) to develop strategy for securing funding and analyzing New Hampshire and East Hartford site probabilities
Post advises a "pure system" and a policy of "non-entanglement" to Board of Education
Speakers Bureau organized
Principals and supervisors informed of in-service plan

OCTOBER 1975

Survey plans finalized
Teachers begin in-service
NEA voucher seminar, Vouchers: Trick or Treat??
Montessori -- Parents' Choice meeting

NOVEMBER 1975

Speakers Bureau increases number of coffee hours with parents and number of teacher workshops
Diggs visits Washington
Meeting with Lamborn and area private school representatives
East Hartford legal strategy meetings
Mass citizen survey mailed out by Parents' Choice

DECEMBER 1975

Behavioral Sciences Associates surveys school staff, citizens, parents

Hodgkinson signs letter reinforcing NIE interest in vouchers

IPDC (teacher union committee) submits voucher report

Connecticut State Department of Education liaison begins

JANUARY 1976

Project prepares final report and recommendations

EHEA survey of teacher attitudes

Esposito press release claims survey results indicate positive attitude from parents

Principals vote 18-0 to reject voucher proposal

Consultant reports submitted

All day public open meeting held by Board

The vote

Appendix D

Acronyms

AFT: American Federation of Teachers. National organization representing teachers.

CSPP: Center for the Study of Public Policy, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Provider of general technical assistance to the Parents' Choice Project.

EHEA: East Hartford Educational Association. Local NEA affiliate.

HEW: Health, Education and Welfare. Cabinet Department overseeing NIE.

IPDC: Instructional Professional Development Commission. EHEA's committee which studied vouchers.

NCER: National Council of Educational Research. NIE's policy advisory board.

NEA: National Education Association. National organization representing teachers.

NIE: National Institute of Education. Federal Agency which funded Parents' Choice.

OEO: Office of Economic Opportunity. Original Federal sponsor of vouchers.

PAT: Parent Advice Team. Provided voucher-related information to East Hartford parents.